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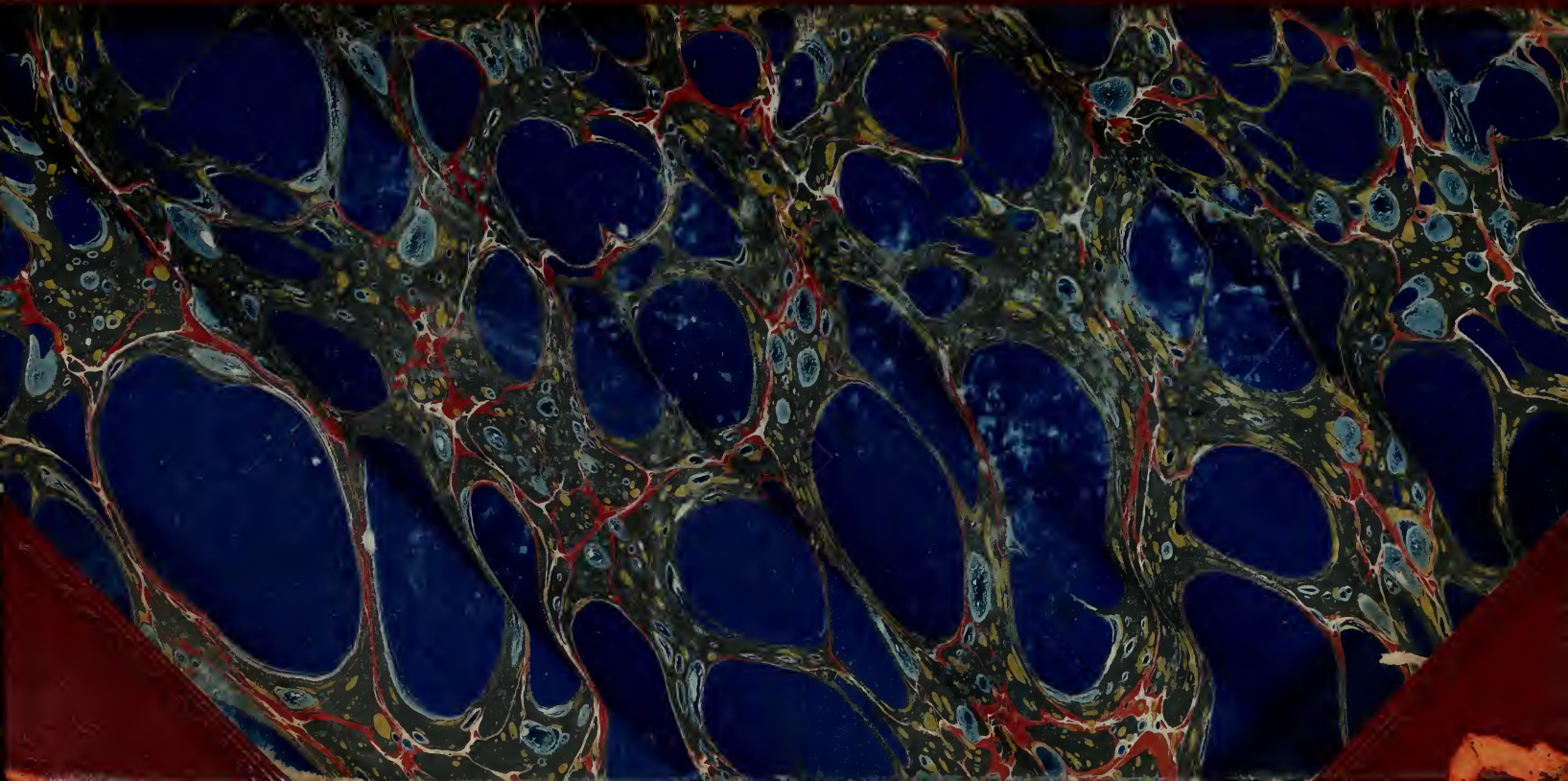

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M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"IT IS NOT CHANGE THAT I WANT," SAID MARIA.

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD.

VOLUME XL.

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CONTENTS.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE. By ISABELLA FYVIE MAYO. With Illustrations by M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

		PAGE
Chap. XXIV.	Waste of Time	1
XXV.	At Work at Mrs. Grale's	7
XXVI.	Shopping	15
XXVII.	Sam Towne's Tale	21
XXVIII.	Walking to the Court	81
XXIX.	Called in to Mrs. Grale	88
XXX.	A Telegram	93
XXXI.	Something Found	98
XXXII.	Lady Laura's Advice	161
XXXIII.	The Letter that was not Found	168
XXXIV.	Mr. Grale's Visit	172
XXXV.	The Mediumship of Miss Bessie Tempest	179
XXXVI.	Webster's Hammer	241
XXXVII.	The Black Pool gives up its Secret	245
XXXVIII.	Morna's Marriage	254
XXXIX.	"Cain"	258
XL.	Edgar to the Rescue	321
XLI.	A Confession	326
XLII.	The Yellow Woman	331
XLIII.	A Journey North	338
XLIV.	The Dead Living	401
XLV.	"A Life for a Life"	411
XLVI.	Conclusion	416

Amethyst Seal, The. By T. W. SPEIGHT	264
Aunt Paradox	342
Board-ship Friendships. By F. E. W.	203
Camping Out. By MINNIE DOUGLAS	235
Christobel. By JOYCE DARRELL	48, 123
Coleridge. By ALICE KING	116
Cyril Trevor's Wood Nymph	151
Devil in Dunchester, The	68
Dickens's Works, The Tendency of	282
Forgotten Tragedy, A. By C. J. LANGSTON	481
Ghost of Bolsover's Bank, The	442
How it Came There	493
Inestimable Loans	232
Invalid's Corner, The. By J. E. PANTON	144
Man from C——, The.	317
Master Bruin. By MARIE ORM	287

PAGE

Miss Oldham's Choice. By the Author of "Adonais, Q.C." . 209
Modern Fatima, A. By H. F. 72
Old Stone Cross, The 221
Only a Daily Episode 381
Pettifer's Clerk 423
Pot Pourri. With Illustrations. By CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S. 458
Romantic Wedding, A. By ANNE BEALE 309
Sabrina 293
Second-hand Gown, A 497
Story of the Day, A. By MARY DOVETON HODGES. . . . 27
Supernatural, On the 38
Thought Reading at Lady Clanjamfrey's. By G. B. STUART . 106
Two Women of Letters. By H. BARTON BAKER 360
Yosodhara. By FABIAN BLAND 372

POETRY.

Remembrance. By G. B. STUART 37
Cape Horn. By T. S. CUNNINGHAM 80
A Heroine of the Gutter 143
A Love Plaint. By A. E. G. 160
Household Names. By HELEN MARION BURNSIDE . . . 220
Sonnet. By LENA MILMAN 292
From the Italian of Plutarch. By ALICE KING 316
Mia—Mai. By S. G. P. 400
After Many Days. By GEORGE COTTERELL 422
Night. By C. E. MEETKERKE 480
Good-bye. By G. B. STUART 492
Their Golden Wedding 516

ILLUSTRATIONS.

By M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

"'It is not change that I want,' said Maria."
"More chairs were brought out for the visitors, and afternoon tea was ordered."
"They came in, Charles Carr and Lettice chatting gaily."
"The Black Pool gives up its Secret."
"She is at peace," said the Highlander, solemnly.
"They knew that the parting was to be for ever."

By FRANK DADD.

Illustrations to "The Ghost of Bolsover's Bank."

Illustrations to "Pot Pourri."

THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WASTE OF TIME.

DREARY enough looked Dering Court on that November day—so thought Dr. Palmer as he approached it. When one has dismal spirits at these dismal seasons, it rather tries the faith to believe in joy and June flowers. The former seems receding in the Past, as the latter are decaying under the sodden leaves.

Dr. Palmer was about to pay his daily visit to his patients, General Vivian and Maria; and he was also intending to question Edgar upon the matters which had been talked of the previous evening between himself and Mr. Grale.

If Allan Grale and Edgar Vivian had really joined hands in any evil doing, then Maria, the Doctor suspected, must know of it. And now that he himself knew the real mystery and secrecy surrounding Allan's departure, he almost questioned whether Maria had not some private grounds for her fear that the young man had committed suicide. Or was there only some subtle instinct in her mind that told her so?

Dr. Palmer was not one of those scientific men who seem to think we have touched the limits of all knowledge. He was not sure that there are no powers lying latent in all humanity, to be here and there abnormally exhibited before the time comes for their harmonious development. Neither was he sure that some minds may not have powers of insight or foresight as superior to others as an acrobat's limbs are more nimble than other legs, or a rope-walker's head steadier than ordinary brains.

Within the house, the wide rooms looked deserted; the very fires seemed lonely, like loving hearts wasting in solitude.

The Doctor's professional visit to the General was brief enough. He was progressing very favourably, but much conversation on his part was still forbidden, and Dr. Palmer and Mrs. Vivian never had much

to say to each other. But she began to talk this morning of the Grales ; asking where young Grale was, and what he went away for : had he gone travelling for the business ?

Doctor Palmer looked at her ; he felt quite sure that she had heard a rumour of there being something crooked about Allan's departure. He thought of poor Maria in her darkened chamber : had this cold woman been talking with her ?

She would not let him escape by silence. She repeated that supposition about travelling for the business.

" I believe he has gone on business of his own, madam," said the Doctor. He tried to speak carelessly and was conscious that he did not succeed.

Mrs. Vivian gave a little, low laugh. " I doubt if Allan's business will ever be as profitable as his father's," she said.

From the General's room, Dr. Palmer went on to Maria's. He found her alone. Her condition was unchanged. There was still the same puzzling absence of any organic disease, combined with a state of nervous irritation and depression, which was certainly a soil in which any disease might soon take root. She could scarcely eat, she could scarcely sleep ; and she was wearing to a shadow. Naturally enough, she had never alluded to Allan Grale to Dr. Palmer. She had never owned to any cause for anxiety. She did so to-day for the first time.

After speaking a little about her own condition, the Doctor recommending various things, Maria mentioned her old fears about her brother George ; he was looking so thin and pale ; worse than ever. And yet he would not own to being ill, neither would he assure her he was quite well. He only said that he must take a change as soon as possible, and then he should be all right.

" Just what I am always saying," observed Dr. Palmer. " As soon as the General can be moved, you should all go South together. And that will be very soon."

" I need not go," said Maria, rather wildly. " It is not change that I want—I know that—sometimes one may understand one's own ailments better than a doctor can. I said to George only yesterday that he ought to take a change—to go South ; upon which he answered very quickly that South would not suit him, and when he went he should go to the North. But—I think," added Maria nervously—" I think Edgar wants change more even than George. He seems to have some great trouble upon him."

" What is the trouble, Miss Vivian ? "

Maria shook her head.

" Is it connected in any way with Allan Grale ? "

Maria started. " Why do you ask that, Dr. Palmer ? "

" The thought occurred to me," was the careless answer. " Allan's own people were in some doubt or trouble about him—as to where he was, I understand : his friend Edgar may have been the same. Is it so, do you think ? "

"Not that I know of," she replied. "He does not tell me; he is quite silent to me. My poor uncle used to be uneasy about both my brothers of late. I remember he spoke anxiously of them on the very morning of his seizure; and his words have come back upon me often since."

"I suppose Edgar has not been treading in the steps of some of those fellows at Oxford, and got involved in any money difficulties?" said the Doctor, cautiously.

Maria looked up astonished; her innocent fancies did not run in that line. "No," she said. "Oh no."

Dr. Palmer did not question her about the fear she had hinted of to Agnes; the time had hardly come for that; he must try to get a little more information himself first; though he would greatly have liked to know whence Maria had derived it.

"I wish you would see Edgar, Dr. Palmer, and—if you can—ask what it is that is amiss with him. I do not think it is his health that is wrong; I think it is the mind."

"Young fellows like your brother Edgar will take life tragically at times," laughed the Doctor, who did not wish to alarm her. The laugh ended rather abruptly with the thought that the passions and follies of youth often sully their waters for ever, before the angels come to trouble them. The Doctor had known many sad stories. Pure and good himself, yet with a mind wide enough to comprehend the frailties of human nature, that drag it down to the lowest depths, even while it would fain aspire towards the divine, he was one of those born-confessors who are to be found within all creeds.

He went in quest of Edgar Vivian. During his conversation with Maria, a slight memory had suddenly revived—the memory of that bright autumn morning when Allan had somehow eluded meeting her and himself in the road. He found Edgar in the morning-room, seated before the fire. The Doctor rallied him on his idleness, and bade him come out and walk with him—he had something to say to him.

Edgar rose to obey, neither with pleasure nor alacrity; but with the mechanical obedience of one who feels that the point will be carried whether or no.

Directly they started, Dr. Palmer went straight to the point at once.

"I have a message to you from Mr. Grale," he said. "He wishes to know when you last saw Allan."

A curious expression flitted across the young man's face. The Doctor could not translate it. Indeed it was too fleeting. It changed and it was gone.

"I can scarcely remember," he answered. "We used to meet occasionally. I did not go about much, after my uncle was taken ill."

"But just before he left home, you wrote a note to him asking him

to meet you at the Black Pool," pursued the Doctor. "His father wants to know whether he kept that appointment?"

"No, he did not," Edgar replied, quite readily. "How did Mr. Grale know about that invitation?" he asked in return. "Did Allan tell him."

"I believe your note was found in Allan's bedroom by his father after he had gone away. And so Allan did not keep that appointment?"

"No—nor did he answer the note," said Edgar. "I have wondered once or twice since whether it was possible he never got it."

"Oh, he must have got it," remarked the Doctor; "but I think it was just about then that he went away. Mr. Grale wants very much to hear what you can tell him about his son. Did Allan tell you that his father would not answer the note you sent to him? At least, would not accede to its request."

"What note?" asked Edgar.

"The note you wrote to Mr. Grale."

"I never wrote to Mr. Grale in my life—that I remember."

The Doctor hesitated. "I think you did," he said, wondering whether the young man could have suddenly developed into bold untruthfulness. Possibly by accident or mistake, Edgar had addressed this letter, both within and without, to "Mr. Grale," so that the father had become possessed of what had been intended for the son.

"Did you happen to write any other note to Allan about that time, just before the one asking him to meet you at the Black Pool?" he enquired.

Edgar did not even pause for a moment's reflection. He answered readily. "No, I am quite sure I did not. I was not in any habit of writing notes to young Grale. I am not so intimate with him as George is."

"Edgar," said the Doctor, "you must forgive me for pressing these questions, and you must answer them quite seriously. Grave matters may be at stake; we can scarcely imagine how grave."

He paused there, to give his words due emphasis. Did Edgar's face grow paler, or was it only that at that moment they passed into the shadow of the pines?

"I must ask you, did you ever borrow money from the Grales?" continued Dr. Palmer. "Tell me the very worst truth, at once, my boy."

There could be no mistake about Edgar's paleness now. "I did," he rather sharply said. "I borrowed fifty pounds from Allan."

"When was that?" asked Dr. Palmer, with a sinking of the heart, for he had hoped, though he could hardly tell how, to hear something different from this.

"Allan Grale brought the money to me on the very day of my uncle's attack."

"And did you ever have any other monetary transactions with him?"

"What do you mean by transactions?" demanded Edgar, a shade of irritation in his tone.

"You must pardon me," said the Doctor. "Of course you can refuse to answer my questions, if you choose. Did you borrow any more money from him?—or did you even seek to borrow any more?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Edgar, with apparently relieved surprise. "No, certainly I never did."

"To put it very plainly to you, Edgar," said Dr. Palmer, "do you know where young Grale now is?"

Edgar Vivian averted his face. "No, Dr. Palmer, I do not." Perhaps it was only the gesture which gave an indistinctness and uncertainty to his tone. But somehow Dr. Palmer did not feel satisfied with the answer.

"Have you any idea that he left home in an abrupt and secret manner?"

"I know nothing about his leaving home," said Edgar Vivian, curtly.

"My dear young friend," went on the Doctor, almost piteously, for he did not like his rôle of inquisitor, "do you know anything which you are willing to tell? If so, tell it at once and spare these questions. If not, say so, and still spare them."

Edgar walked on in silence for some paces. His usually bright face looked dark.

"I know nothing which it is in my power to tell you, Dr. Palmer. At least not until I know why I am asked—and possibly not then."

The Doctor could have groaned with disappointment. "Will you answer this one question," he said. "Has there not been some communication between you and Allan Grale since his departure?"

Edgar Vivian visibly hesitated. "Yes," he said, with constraint, "I suppose you may believe so. But under present circumstances I cannot say anything about that."

"Have you directed a parcel to him—to wait at the station of Corrabuin until called for?"

"Dr. Palmer, I most earnestly beg of you not to put further questions to me."

"Mr. Grale is anxious about his son," stated the Doctor, forlornly, feeling that he was fighting some intangible influence adverse to his purpose. "I suppose you mean me to be at liberty to tell him all you have told me."

"Yes, if you like. I have told you very little."

They had reached a cross-road, and they instinctively paused to part there. Edgar continued, with something of compunction in his tone. "It isn't my own affair you have been asking me about, Doctor. We must not be too frank with other people's business."

"You have told me plenty that will interest Mr. Grale, in saying

that Allan did not meet you at the Black Pool, that he did not answer your note, that you had never made any application for a second loan, and that you have had communication with him since he went away. Enough to interest him, but scarcely to satisfy him, I think. He will probably seek an interview with you, himself."

Edgar said nothing. His eyes uneasily sought the distant horizon.

"It is not for me to ask you to let Mr. Grale wholly into your confidence," went on the Doctor. "That must be left to your own judgment. But I do ask you to be as considerate towards him as you can. He is an elderly man—and is somewhat tried just now."

"Yes, I suppose so," was the answer, spoken earnestly.

"Edgar Vivian, I am thinking of you as well as of Mr. Grale. You have been clearly in some trouble, or you would not have been borrowing that sum of money. Are you out of that trouble yet? Forgive an old friend's interest."

"I am out of that trouble: at least I shall be, for I can now see my way to repay Mr. Grale, if he is in no hurry for it—and I only borrowed the money of Allan on that condition." Edgar spoke almost haughtily. He was thinking of Agnes, and of the bad impression he was probably creating in her father's mind. Unconsciously Edgar had emphasised "*that* trouble." The Doctor looked at him and shook his head slightly.

"You have asked me a great many questions, Dr. Palmer," said the young man. "I don't resent your having done so; I honour your motives. But you must pardon me for asking one in return. Do you know on whose information Mr. Grale has heard this?"

"On nobody's information," said the Doctor, quite eagerly. For if there was anything he counted desirable, it was to keep the atmosphere of life free from suspicion of spies and hostile critics. "On nobody's information, but on the simple evidence of a few facts. There was your note for instance, making the appointment for the Black Pool."

The Doctor paused in reflection. He felt that Edgar watched him narrowly.

"One fact, bearing on these recent communications, was told by a quite unconnected person, told innocently, with no idea of its significance," said Dr. Palmer. This referred to the letter which had come from Savoch, from Mrs. Gibson to her sister.

"If I make a correct guess as to that person, will you tell me if I am right?"

"Yes, most certainly," said the Doctor, wondering.

"Was it not the woman who lodges with Mrs. Massey—the strange woman who goes about in a yellow cloak?"

Dr. Palmer stared and then laughed. "No, indeed it was not," he quickly said. "That's a strange fancy. What could have put that woman into your head?"

"Well—I suppose it was a fancy. I don't like that woman, Dr. Palmer. I am not sure but I fear her. Why does she dodge people's footsteps?—Twice I have detected her following mine, once by night, once by day. As to the Black Pool, she seems to haunt it."

Dr. Palmer was listening attentively.

"Does your sister Maria know that you have had any communication with Allan Grale since he went away?" he asked.

"No, certainly not," replied Edgar, emphatically. "I do not discuss private affairs, that concern me and my friends, even with my sister. And you may be inferring too much, sir. I have told you nothing on that head."

"You mean that you have not absolutely told me you have had communication from Allan."

"Just so."

"It would be the greatest possible relief to the minds of poor Mr. and Mrs. Grale to know that you had. They are uneasy, naturally so, not having heard of him since he went away. They would give a great deal to know where he is."

"I could not tell them that," said Edgar. "I do not know myself."

The speakers parted. That one remark of Edgar Vivian's kept returning to Dr. Palmer's mind as he walked along the sodden November roads. Why did the yellow woman follow *him* about? And why did she haunt the Black Pool?

But, summing up his interview with the young man, Dr. Palmer came to the conclusion that it had been an unsatisfactory one; little better than waste of time.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT WORK AT MRS. GRALE'S.

When Mr. Grale heard of the strange replacing of the diamond cross, he received the startling news with an indifference which his wife considered stolid and unnatural. Mrs. Grale wanted to enjoy her excitement, which one can scarce do to the full alone, and as Mary Anne was not to know of the event, to whom could she look for the required sympathy, if not to her husband? There was only one consolation in his apathy—he seemed to have so thoroughly accepted her assurances on the care with which she kept her keys that he asked no question on the subject. But he said this:

"And, as the keys are never out of your possession, it must mean that somebody has a master key."

She thought he seemed inclined to say that with a derisive smile, rather than with due alarm. But to turn him from any dangerous enquiry, she answered in a flurry:

"Well, it may be a good thing if they have, since it gave them a chance of putting back what they had taken, and regaining their honesty. But I'd like to know who it was, for all that," she added, shrewdly, "for I don't say I'd trust such a thief again—and I don't believe much in a repentance that is so careful of not taking shame to itself."

"Well, well," said her husband, "it is over now—let it pass this time. If it happens again, we will make proper enquiry."

"The impudence of oiling the spring of the case!" cried Mrs. Grale. "It must have been a bold thief, Richard!"

That little detail took hold of her fancy amazingly; and she could not help thinking how wonderfully it would add to the colour of the story she would have to tell, when once the embargo of silence was removed. That must happen in time; Mrs. Grale could not conceive of secrets that are to be kept for ever.

Dr. Palmer lost no time in seeking Mr. Grale. Shut up with him that same afternoon in the counting-house at the Works, the Doctor repeated the scant and most unsatisfactory answers he had received from Edgar Vivian. Mr. Grale said little, but he followed every item with close attention, his few answering comments showing how he weighed the significance of every word.

When Dr. Palmer dwelt on young Vivian's denial of having ever written to Allan's father, or of any knowledge of the request for the second loan, Mr. Grale did not forget to remind him that he had considered the handwriting of that note the most like the one on the Corrabuin label: and when Dr. Palmer urged that they had not yet got Edgar's admission of having written that, he grimly said that they had Edgar's admission that he had had some communication with Allan, though he refused to say more on the subject. "And well might he refuse to confess to any knowledge of that box!" added Mr. Grale, in a burst of impulse.

"Stay," said Dr. Palmer; "I cannot be sure that Vivian did admit it. At first I thought he did; tacitly though, rather than in direct words; but later, on my referring to it, he reminded me that he did not."

"What am I to understand?" retorted Mr. Grale. "Did he admit having held communication with my son since his flight, or did he not?"

"Mr. Grale, it is as I say to you—that I cannot be sure. If Vivian has held any, rely upon it he has some deep motive for not letting it be known."

"Some deep devilry," cried Mr. Grale, angrily. "That's what they are in together."

"I think they must hold some deep secret together; or else—or else," added Dr. Palmer, half musingly—"Edgar would like to cause it to be thought he has had communication from Allan, when he has not."

"But why should he do that?"

"I cannot say. The whole matter is puzzling me, sir, more than you may think for."

"He denies knowing where Allan is."

"He does. And so far I think we may rely upon him. One thing that he said, I must mention to you ——"

Dr. Palmer paused. He was about to speak of the "yellow woman," but an idea suddenly struck him that he must do so with caution, for he had been half wondering whether that mysterious personage might be a detective employed by Mr. Grale to pry into the movements of his son and Edgar Vivian.

"You were about to say ——?" said Mr. Grale.

"Yes. Do you know anything of a woman who has come to lodge in Dering, and goes about in a yellow cloak?" continued the Doctor.

"Not likely," curtly answered Mr. Grale, as if he considered Dr. Palmer was wandering from the point in discussion. "I've heard one and another mention such a woman; I never saw her."

And Dr. Palmer felt that the rough-spoken words were true. "When Edgar Vivian asked me who it was that had enlightened you upon the box waiting at Corrabuin and other things," he went on, "he said he thought it must be that individual, the yellow woman."

"The yellow woman!—enlightened me!" cried Mr. Grale, in surprise. "What made him say that?"

"I do not know."

"What should she know about my son's business?—or Edgar Vivian's?"

"Again I can only say I do not know. Mr. Grale I am deeply sensible how little I have helped you with your cause in undertaking to question Edgar Vivian, but I assure you I was met by some opposing influence at every step. I wish you'd see him yourself. You may be able to make more of him than I could."

Mr. Grale did not say whether he should take the advice, or not. He leaned back in his chair, musing, his hands in his pockets. Dr. Palmer rose. There was nothing more to wait for.

"After all, Doctor, I look upon it that we are just about where we were and no further," he said, suddenly. "Allan has disappeared, and no living mortal seems to know where."

On the day following this, Mr. Grale, upon going home to luncheon, found by some chance remarks passing between Mary Anne and her mother, that the "yellow woman" was absolutely at that time working at Moorland house. He pricked up his ears, remembering the words of Dr. Palmer.

"Who is this Miss West?" he asked. "A seamstress?"

"Yes, papa," said Mary Anne. "She works beautifully."

"But who is she?"

"I'm sure I don't know," returned Mary Anne. "It does not

matter to us, while she does her work well. She is a superior kind of person."

Mr. Grale thought he would take a look at this woman. Hearing that she was working in the disused nursery, or playroom, which was in handy proximity to the linen-closet, and, like it, was a wide, low-pitched room, scantily furnished, with wide, small paned windows, he went up to it. Beside the old-fashioned fire-place, in a low, comfortable chair covered with coarse, red flannel, sat Miss West. Mr. Grale saw a neat-looking little woman, in a good merino gown with a small white edging at the throat and wrist, and her dark hair braided back from her face. She looked up when he entered but did not pause in her stitching.

He made a pretext of wanting to look for something in a cupboard at the far end of the room, which really held nothing but stray numbers of old periodicals. Taking up one of these, he approached Miss West, remarking that the weather to-day was disagreeable. He understood she was a stranger in Dering. She must find the state of the roads very different from that of town causeways.

"Yes, sir," said Miss West, in her quiet, easy manner. "But I am used to country roads—I have lived quite as much in the country as in town."

"And which do you like best?" asked Mr. Grale.

Miss West smiled. "Each has its advantages, sir," she answered. "And as one generally has a reason for being where one is at the time, one likes that best while there."

"An uncommonly sensible woman," thought Mr. Grale. But there was something about her which made him feel uncomfortable, he could not possibly have told why. He would have liked to question her, to ask what her business was in Dering; but he felt that she was quite capable of replying in the most naïvely respectful manner, yet telling him nothing. He went downstairs thinking.

"Can it be——?" But the mental question was interrupted by his meeting Susan, the parlour-maid, taking up, by her mistress's orders, a glass of wine to the seamstress.

"So you have had the master in here!" exclaimed Susan, as she cleared a place for the wine-glass amidst the litter of the sewing table.

"Yes," said Miss West, "and a pleasant-spoken gentleman I found him."

"Ah, he's not always so," said Susan—"as many a one could tell you. He keeps people in subjection, he does—ask his clerks that. It's said, you know, that it was nothing but his quarrelling drove poor Mr. Allan away."

Miss West looked up. "Was it?" she asked.

"*I* think so," said Susan, who held Miss West in especial favour, because she lodged at Mrs. Massey's, and Mrs. Massey's son was Susan's young man. "The mistress and Miss Mary Anne believed

he was in his room as usual, whatever master knew, and then we thought he would be gone only for two or three days, but the days are turning into weeks now"

"Where did he go to? Where is he?"

"Nobody knows," said Susan. "*We* don't."

"Mrs. Grale will know where her son is."

"No, that she does not," dissented Susan, eagerly. "I don't believe it. She fretted dreadful at first. It's the master who knows, if anybody does; and the mistress has cheered up a little again, lately."

"Mrs. Grale must know all about it," persisted the work-woman; "or, as time passes on, she would grow more anxious, instead of less so."

Susan shook her head. "The mistress doesn't have much of her own way. She's a good sort of mistress, and means well; but she can't go very deep. *She's* frightened of the master," added Susan, with emphasis. "That is, she daren't go against him."

"And is Miss Mary Anne frightened of her father?" asked Miss West.

"Miss Mary Anne thinks of nothing but herself," confided Susan; "of herself and Mr. George Vivian. She thinks he is in love with her: leastways, hopes he is. But I don't fancy Mr. George would come to this house for a wife."

"And why not?" asked Miss West, who appeared to be taking a good deal of silent interest in the conversation.

"Why, because they are quite a different style of family!" exclaimed Susan. "It's all money, money, money, with our people, and they've got to domineer over other folks to try to keep their own place. The Vivians have no fear for theirs! They are the Vivians of Dering, and everyone knows it. I've seen the General take an old woman's basket and carry it up the hill for her, and Miss Maria makes herself a true friend to everybody who wants one. Joe Massey says that after his accident if Miss Maria called and found him lacking anything, she'd go straight back to the Court and bring it down with her own hands."

"I have heard about you and Joe Massey," pleasantly remarked Miss West, biting off an end of thread.

Susan smiled and blushed. "And the two gentlemen, Mr. George and Mr. Edgar, always speak so pleasant to one," she went on. "They'd as soon think of domineering over their horses and dogs as over us poor people."

Something in the speech seemed to offend the seamstress. "And if their politeness comes from the same cause—that they deem poor people to be a different order of being from themselves—then I'd rather a thousand times have the overbearing insolence of the Grales!" said she, flaring into sudden and unaccountable heat.

It did not ruffle thoughtless, good-humoured Susan. "I wouldn't,"

said she. "If people are pleasant and civil in their dealings with you, what more do you want of them? I'm sure that afternoon when Mr. Edgar came up to ask for Mr. Allan, speaking so gently and kindly, I thought his very manner was enough to wile a bird off a bough."

Miss West gave a queer laugh. "To wile a bird off a bough!" she echoed. "Aye."

"It is Mr. George who has generally been most intimate in coming here for Mr. Allan," pursued Susan, "but that afternoon it was Mr. Edgar. And he wrote that note, which there's been a talk of, in our very hall here, tearing a leaf out of his own pocket-book and twisting it up after for me to give to Mr. Allan. It was the very day Mr. Allan went away."

Miss West let her sewing lie still in her lap. She was looking at Susan.

"What was in the note?" she said.

"It was asking Mr. Allan to meet him at the Black Pool."

"*Did* he meet him there?" eagerly cried Miss West.

"I don't know," answered Susan. "He went out as soon as he had swallowed his dinner, and he did not come back again."

The work-woman had never taken her eyes from Susan's face.

"Was Mr. Edgar Vivian so condescending as to tell you what was in the note?" she questioned, in a mocking tone.

The girl coloured. "No, he didn't," she said, shortly. "And I didn't peep inside, either, as perhaps you are thinking. When the young master read the note, he must have left it lying open on his toilet-table—and I happened—I could not help it—to see what it said. I folded the note up again into the same twists and left it there: I didn't like Mr. Allan to know it had been read. Not that there was anything in it that all the house might not have seen—just two or three lines asking Mr. Allan to go to the Black Pool."

"And—he—never—came—home—again!" repeated Miss West, with a pause between every word as if in deep thought.

"No. Never since then."

"Do you remember the date, Susan?"

"Yes, I do—I remember it by something particular that concerns myself. It was a Tuesday, and the 20th of October."

Miss West nodded—as if she had expected the answer.

"I think I saw him myself that same night," she said, slowly.

"La!" exclaimed Susan. "Where?"

"Oh, in the road," said Miss West, evasively. "I was not quite sure that it was Mr. Allan Grale, though I was nearly sure; but he looked rather stouter than usual and hardly as tall. But the moonlight is deceptive, and I was not very near him. He had on a light over-coat."

"That was him," said Susan. "The master asked about that light over-coat, and James said his young master took it out with

him. He had it on his arm when he walked from the door, but James saw him take hold of it as if he was going to put it on. I wonder what he and Mr. Edgar had got to talk about? And what a gruesome place to meet at!—that Black Pool."

Miss West took up her sewing again. "I should not speculate upon the matter, were I you, Susan," she said, reprovingly. "Gentlemen may have business matters to discuss that do not concern other people."

Susan listened with perfect good-temper. She decided that Miss West was an old maid, and all old maids were ridiculously particular.

When Mr. Grale went down stairs after leaving the nursery, he drew a chair to the dining-room fire, and sat down to think. The prolonged absence of his son and the fact of his not writing to them was beginning to disturb him, but only in a slight degree. He was now asking himself why Edgar Vivian should refuse to tell what he knew—if he knew anything—and why he should suspect that seamstress of having spoken to him, Mr. Grale, about matters that concerned his son. But upon these points his mind wholly refused to give him any answering light.

"Well, well, we must hope it will come soon," mused he. "Every day must bring us nearer to hearing something or other."

Just as he was about to rise and take his departure for the Works, Mrs. Grale came into the room.

"Why, Richard!" she exclaimed, "I didn't know you were here; I thought you had gone back long ago. Is anything the matter? Are you not well?"

It was so very unusual for Mr. Grale to linger at home in the day-time that she put the question. More often than not he did not come in to lunch at all.

"Well? I'm quite well," crustily answered Mr. Grale. "What should ail me?"

Mrs. Grale sat down on the other side of the hearth, and drew her chair near to him. She had been wanting to talk to him, but had not liked to begin; perhaps this might be a good opportunity.

"We don't hear from Allan, Richard."

"No," he answered. "Shan't be long first, I daresay, now."

"If I could only think it!" she sighed. "Richard, I've wanted to say something to you, but I couldn't sum up courage. You take me up so sharply if I ever mention such things."

"What things?" he asked.

"Well—all sorts of things. Dreams, for example."

"Dreams!" Mr. Grale's voice had a great scorn in it.

"Yes, I know how you ridicule all that. But, Richard, I'm very unhappy; you may see it for yourself, though I don't talk of it; and I wish you'd let me just tell you what I want to tell, and listen to me quietly. I try to be patient; you know I do."

"You can tell it," said Mr. Grale, in a kinder tone.

"You remember that note which we found on Allan's dressing-table," began Mrs. Grale. "It was from Edgar Vivian, you said, but you did not show it to me. I might have opened it for myself before, but I did not. Was it not to make an appointment for Allan to meet young Vivian at the Black Pool?"

"Yes—to fish. How did you get to know it?"

"Mary Anne said so yesterday. She had heard it from somebody or other. Well, I think then, we may be at liberty to conjecture that when Alny hastened out that evening after his dinner, it was to keep that appointment. Do you think so?"

"I can't say. It might have been."

"Well now, Richard," continued poor Mrs. Grale, trembling slightly, "this is what I want you not to be angry with me for—what I'm going to say now. That night; that very same night, you understand; I had a dreadful dream about the Black Pool. I was in frightful distress over somebody that was drowning in it. I seemed to feel the water upon my face; I did indeed, Richard; and my poor sister Marget was following me about everywhere. I have never had so bad a dream as that."

"You had been eating too many good things at Lady Laura Bond's, Mary."

"That dream of mine was not all," continued Mrs. Grale, paying no heed to the common-place suggestion in her distress. "In that letter which I had from Marget, about the box waiting at Corrabuin, she tells me she had just the same sort of dream on the same night—and she had it also, or something like it, on other nights afterwards. I'll read you what she says; I have the letter here."

Rapidly taking the letter from her pocket, Mrs. Grale read aloud the part relating to her sister's dream.

"'The dreams began on a Tuesday night—it was the Twentieth of October. I seemed to be in a wild, dreary place, where there was a dreadful looking pool surrounded by dark trees, and I felt as if I were tossing up and down in icy-cold water, and I could hear you sobbing and crying. I woke up once, and I can tell you, Polly, my fright was that bad I shook the bed; after a bit, I fell asleep again and the dream came back.' Now, Richard," Mrs. Grale went on, after a moment's pause, "despite your unbelief in such things, you must see it's odd that I and Marget Gibson should have had that horrible dream the same night, she up in Scotland and I here."

"Nothing has come of it, to you, or to her," said Mr. Grale, compassionately, suppressing his ridicule.

Mrs. Grale was folding the letter to return it to her pocket. "There were other things mixed up in her dreams, that it's no use writing about, Marget says. But, Richard—I've been thinking—since I heard Alny went out to go to the Black Pool that same night, whether —whether ——"

Mrs. Grale hesitated. "Thinking what?" asked her husband.

"Whether any harm happened to him? Any accident? Whether he could have tumbled into the Pool and couldn't get out again?"

She had lowered her voice to a whisper, and before it ceased it was so hushed that Mr. Grale could hardly catch the words.

He sat looking into the fire, not speaking. Mrs. Grale sat looking at him.

"No, no, Mary; no," he said, sharply. "It is not likely. He would not be at the Black Pool by himself, and whoever was with him would pretty soon pull him out, or give the alarm."

"That would be Edgar Vivian," she said, quietly.

"Edgar Vivian says they did not meet there. Besides, he—he has heard in some way from Alny since he went away."

"Then you have been enquiring about it, Richard! You have been uneasy yourself."

"Uneasy! certainly not," said Mr. Grale, wishing to disperse her own uneasiness. "After reading that note, it was natural I should enquire whether they met or not. Calm your mind, Polly; there's nothing to fear. It's these rubbishing dreams that have upset you; nothing else."

He went off to the mills as he spoke, walking with quite a débonnaire manner, for he knew she was watching him from the window. But there's no doubt that his mind was rather disagreeably exercised.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHOPPING.

Time crept on at Dering as elsewhere, and people began to talk about Christmas.

In the two chief houses at Dering the season could bring little festivity. General Vivian had not had any relapse; he was recovering slowly; but the medical men did not appear to be easy about him, and warned his nephews that his life might end suddenly, with scarcely an hour's warning. George Vivian's face grew solemn as he heard this.

Maria, too, was better, but her recovery was of that sort which is sometimes less satisfactory than continued illness. It was not recovery of her old self. It was but a struggle back from the depths to a very low level of existence. At the time when she was picturing the worst, as to the fate of Allan Grale, her brother George, paying a visit to her in her room, had casually mentioned, thinking it would be pleasant to her to hear it, and believing it then himself, that Allan was in Scotland and had written to his mother; and this in a degree revived Maria.

She no longer remained in her room or kept her shutters closed, or

secluded herself from her duties to her uncle or her supervision over the servants. She did that much. But she was no more to be met going out visiting, or traversing the lanes on errands of helpful kindliness. Neither, when she could avoid it, was she visible in the drawing-room. She saw the Palmers once or twice, but she eluded anything like an interview with the girls. She was never seen in public—not even at church, though once or twice she stole down to a short week-night service, held by the kindly vicar for the purpose of imparting a little comfort and cheer to the aged, lonely, and illiterate people of his flock. It quite startled the good man when, in the dim lamplight, he saw Miss Vivian's white, up-turned face. As soon as the service was over, she glided away like a ghost, hastening out of the little churchyard and crossing the Court gardens alone. Neither brothers, nor uncle nor aunt, knew of those church attendances. They believed her to be shut up in her own room.

"A nervous shock of some kind," decided the doctors, and the Dering people thought it was due to her uncle's sudden and alarming illness. Only Dr. Palmer and Agnes knew better. They knew of that strange fear of hers concerning Allan, but they did not speak of it, even to each other; and, though the fear must have been set at rest, they concluded that the shock had thus told upon her.

Mrs. Grale would have given way before this, but for her stern and strong-minded husband. As the days and days went on, and still there came to the anxious mother no tidings from her son, she now and again whispered her fears to her husband in the privacy of their chamber. He calmed her, quieted her; he told her that he thought Alny must have gone for a sea-voyage and that they could not hear from him just yet. He did not altogether believe this himself; in truth, he knew not what to believe; but he thought it not an unlikely step for Allan to take, and he knew there were reasons for his absenting himself from Dering.

The Grales were going to London for a few weeks. It was Mr. Grale who suggested it; and he did so for the sake of his depressed and nervous wife. The change of scene and the general racket which a visit to London implied, might divert her mind from home troubles. They might spend Christmas there, he said.

Mrs. Grale opposed the idea; at first on general grounds. She had not the courage to say that she wanted to be ready to receive her son, if his heart softened to his home at Christmas time. She said that she hated to be out of her own snug house in the cold weather—that she could not bear railway travelling, and so on. But Mary Anne told the plain truth for her and to her, reproaching her again with caring nothing for her daughter's pleasure or her husband's wishes, but preferring to mope about on some vague hope of Allan's turning up.

"And if he should come while we are away—what of it?" urged Mary Anne. "He would not run off again, even if we were not here."

"Ah, Mary Anne—you don't know."

Mary Anne softened as she saw her mother's dropping tears. "If he once comes back, mamma, he will stay, never fear; he will have found out the difference between his own good home and other places. I *cannot* think what is keeping him away."

Decidedly, Mary Anne Grale was mystified about what could have caused so deadly a breach between her father and brother. For she retained her first impression: that there had been a quarrel more or less definite between them.

"I should not be surprised if Allan is in London himself," she said.

"Mary Anne!"

"Well, mamma, I have thought lately that he may be there. We have been thinking of Scotland just because of that box—of which nothing seems to have come. But what should a sociable, lively young fellow, like Alny, do in that bleak, lonely Scotland, where he knows nobody? He has to stay away from us for a time, I take it, as he and papa are at daggers drawn; and what more likely than that he should take up his abode in London? It is just the place to live cheaply and privately in; and he would be at no loss for acquaintances. He knows intimately some of the medical students at St. George's Hospital."

Mrs. Grale answered not a word. But the random shot told. She was in that state of mind which catches at any slight ray of hope as a relief. She grew to believe it might be as her daughter said, and she made no further objection to the scheme of going to London.

But Mrs. Grale's protracted unwillingness to go, and some matters of business which arose at the Works needing the presence of the master, took up further time, and December was now getting on. It was finally decided that they should leave Moorland House on the shortest day, and probably not return to it until the end of January.

Mary Anne was eager for the departure. Not only for the excitement and pleasure that the sojourn would of itself give her, but also because she thought she might see more of George Vivian there than she did at home. He did not often call at Moorland House; and there was no visiting just now at the Court. George often ran up to London, and Mary Anne meant to suggest to her mother that he should on some one of these occasions stay with them there. Mary Anne Grale indulged in delightful visions of morning performances and classical concerts, of choral services and winter galleries, and all their possibilities of tête-à-tête intercourse.

She threw out her little bait artfully enough, when George, calling in at Moorland House, found them in the midst of their final preparations for departure.

"Of course you will feel it your bounden duty to shut yourself up with the dear invalids at the Court," she said.

"I may have other duties outside the Court," he answered, rather

soberly, and never noticed the bridling blush with which his words were received.

"But if you should be in London, and you might happen to go up, you know, you will find us at the Belvedere Hotel. Do you know the Belvedere?"

"It is in one of the streets leading out of Piccadilly—opposite the Green Park," said George, with scarcely a second's reflection. "A very pleasant house to stay at, I believe, and well conducted. Certainly it is in a capital position."

Mary Anne smiled. "A quiet, old-fashioned place, which suits quiet, old-fashioned people," she said. "When you are in London, you must not forget us. Mamma will be so glad to see a familiar face from home; she never is quite happy away from it. And you are such a favourite of hers!"

George Vivian smiled his pleasant smile. He had a tender feeling for all middle-aged matrons—except his aunt!—for the sake of the dead mother who would have been one of them had she lived till now.

"That is Mrs. Grale's kindness," he said. "And I suppose you are looking forward to a very gay time."

"We can scarcely be gay," sighed Mary Anne, sentimentally raising her eyes to his. "We are going up for mamma's sake; she feels so very unhappy at Allan's prolonging his absence in this manner."

George made no answering remark.

"We are going up in the quietest way possible," continued Mary Anne. "We are not taking the carriages; we shall hire in London. Mamma is always nervous in driving our country horses in town. I daresay we shall see nobody we know. Dear Lady Laura Bond says her kinsman will certainly call—Lord Rockford, you know; and he will no doubt bring young Pelerin—but they are nobody."

She smiled, a smile of girlish innocence, and spoke carelessly, as if young lords were every-day friends. And she was rewarded by seeing a faint shade of irritation in George's face. It was the natural irritation of a man, compelled by every injunction of charity and courtesy to be silent, when he would have liked to express some strong disapprobation and warning. It is not only Mary Anne Grale who has mistaken such irritation for jealousy!

In London, Mrs. Grale found in one respect a sort of relief. When there was no letter from Allan among those delivered at the Belvedere Hotel, she could say to herself that perhaps there was one at Moorland House by this time and it would be forwarded in due course. At any moment she liked, she could imagine that Allan had just arrived in Dering and would post after them without delay.

She liked to drive by St. George's Hospital; some vague hope being ripe within her that she might see her son coming down its steps. She caused enquiries to be made of the students there—or, rather, Mr. Grale did—whether they had lately seen anything of Mr.

Allan Grale. But they had not; did not, in fact, seem to know who Mr. Allan Grale was; yet Mary Anne felt nearly sure that St. George's was the hospital at which Allan had acquaintances. Mrs. Grale took a never-failing interest in the crowds in the street; and whilst Mary Anne did her fancy shopping, she would sit waiting in the carriage with more patience than she had been wont to show on similar occasions, for she was watching for a face that never passed.

George Vivian spent an evening with them at the hotel. But Mary Anne somehow picked up an uncomfortable conviction that this visit might not have been paid, but for an accidental encounter.

She was at a certain shop in Bond Street. It was very near their hotel, and Mary Anne had gone there earlier than the usual hour for shopping; but she found three or four customers in the shop before her. The article she wanted was not at hand, and had to be sought for. Leisurely waiting, Miss Grale looked about her. One of the customers was a gentleman. He sat at the same side of the shop as herself, but higher up; one or two model costumes stood on frames between them, so that all she could see of him was one foot and a walking stick. But she could see his purchases piled up on the counter. There was a cloak lined with gray squirrel; "exactly," thought Mary Anne, "like Maria Vivian's." There were two heavy folds of some fine woollen stuff, one in navy blue, the other in a rich moss green, there was a box of gloves and a soft felt bonnet with some yards of ribbon and lace. All these tempting commodities were evidently to be folded and packed for a long journey. Mary Anne felt quite interested in her feminine curiosity. But as the gentleman, his business completed, got up to leave the shop, Mary Anne saw that it was George Vivian.

'You are an early bargainer!" he said; and she fancied he looked a little embarrassed. "Have you been here long?"

"Not very long," said Mary Anne. "I have not begun my bargaining yet. And now, of course you are on your way to our hotel, Mr. Vivian. Or were you going to play us so false as to be in London and not come near mamma at all?"

"Why should you think me so base as that?" he asked, laughing. "I only came up last night, and have sundry urgent commissions to execute, which I am getting through as fast as I can. I must be in Dering again to-morrow morning. Shall you be at home this evening?"

"Oh, yes," she answered. "We dine at six o'clock. Will you join us then? Papa and mamma will be delighted."

George accepted the invitation, and they parted for the time.

He kept his appointment punctually. But certainly Mary Anne did not get much satisfaction out of that evening. Her own temper was rather fretted with wondering who could be so intimate with George Vivian as to trouble him with such a commission as she had seen him execute. It could not be Maria. She would not want a

second squirrel cloak; and Mrs. Vivian never condescended to anything lower than sealskin with sable tails. Besides, the felt bonnet was of too youthful a shape for Mrs. Vivian, and Mary Anne did wonder what pretty face it was destined to adorn. George did not volunteer the information, and she would not ask it. Then it seemed to Mary Anne that her father had never been so peremptory and uncompromising. They played whist after dinner; she and Mr. Grale were partners, and he kept finding fault with her play. When George wished them good-bye and went away, he had said never a word about his purchases.

This visit happened only two or three days after Christmas. Now in Dering it had long been the custom to have a little village festivity in the schoolroom on the last evening of the year, ending with seeing the New Year in at a midnight service in the church. Gifts were always distributed among the old folks and the children on this occasion, and if Mrs. Grale's bales of flannel, and heaps of woollen socks were not quite so fine as those sent from the Court, they were always double in size and number. The young Dering people who had more time than money, such as the Miss Palmers, or the poor genteel widows and maiden ladies, had hitherto provided for the children by manufacturing satchels and workbags, pinafores and pincushions. But this year, Mrs. Grale, in the restless activity of her present state of mind, had planned a new departure. She had seen how far and how effectively a very little money would go among the wares displayed at Christmas in the London toy shops, and she had invested accordingly in little bottles of scent, painted paper pictures, and toys that were not bulky. These were all packed in readiness to be sent to Dering. And it suddenly occurred to Mrs. Grale, as she sat at breakfast the morning after George Vivian's visit, that he might take them down for her, and so save the payment by rail. Mrs. Grale was ever thrifty. "They could be just put into the first class carriage beside him, and then no harm could happen to them," she remarked. Mr. Grale maintained his usual early habits, had breakfasted and was gone out.

"I cannot think how you can dream of troubling Mr. Vivian about such rubbish," cried Mary Anne. "He will have parcels enough of his own," she added, acidly.

"No trouble at all," returned Mrs. Grale. "What is a little trouble to young men? And Mr. Vivian is too obliging to object, if it were. I'll send Susan to the station with the things in a cab, Mary Anne; and I'll bid her just stow them in wherever Mr. Vivian tells her."

"You will find that Susan herself will not care for such an errand, mamma."

But there she reckoned without her host. Susan had come to London in attendance on the ladies, their own maid being ill; and her face brightened the moment she heard what her mistress wished her to do. Mr. Vivian would leave London from the station where her

sweetheart, Joe Massey, was employed; and Susan was just delighted at being sent to it.

She had no difficulty in finding Mr. Vivian. He was walking up and down the platform smoking a cigar, and had his pleasant smile ready the moment he saw a Dering face. He accepted the charge quite cheerfully; just as Mrs. Grale had thought.

"Put the things into that carriage," he said, indicating one. "The train will be off in two or three minutes, and no fellow passenger has arrived. I have nothing of my own, except that little black bag."

"I hope they won't be much trouble to you, sir, at Dering," Susan ventured to say, thinking of the scarcity of accommodation and porters at the station there.

"I'm going to Carstow," replied Mr. Vivian. "Don't you see that this is a main line train? Our carriage will be waiting for me at Carstow, and I'll take the parcels on to Dering in it."

Susan was not very clear about main lines and branches. But she knew the Vivian carriage sometimes went to the Carstow station.

The train went off, leaving a very happy girl behind it, for George Vivian had bestowed a handsome "Christmas box" on her. "As if I'd brought him a beautiful gift, instead of a trumpery botheration," she thought, turning a bright face on Joe Massey, who had now leisure to speak to her.

"The Vivians are the right sort," said young Massey. "It's always a pleasure to me to see Mr. George's face up here. He used to be at this station a good bit two or three months ago, but I've not seen him lately. One time when I saw him here he was sending a party off by the Scotch express. A young lady it was."

Joe Massey had to return to his duties, and Susan went back to the hotel.

"Did you catch Mr. Vivian, Susan?—and did he put my parcels among his own?" asked her mistress.

"Your parcels are in the carriage with him all right, ma'am," replied Susan. "Mr. Vivian had not any of his own; at least, only one little black bag. He seemed quite pleased to take them; he was not in the least put about."

Mary Anne, drawing at the table, sketched on silently. "Taking no parcels down!" she thought to herself. "Who on earth was he buying those things for?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

SAM TOWNE'S TALE.

And then time went on, and the Grales returned to Dering, and Mrs. Grale had the pleasure of seeing her pretty paper views on many a cottage wall, and of smelling her cheap perfumes copiously exhaling from clean handkerchiefs carried folded into the parish church. The

pathos of Christmas and the fresh start of the New Year had alike gone by, and had not brought home Allan Grale. Neither had he been seen or heard of in London.

Mrs. Grale pined and fretted in her furtive, helpless way; but if she ever dropped a tear or said a word about Alny to her husband, he would not let her go on; while Mary Anne, who really saw no particular cause for anxiety, assured her mother that Alny would come back at his own time as flourishing as a green bay tree.

Mr. Grale never voluntarily spoke of his son. Mrs. Grale thought he was indifferent; that is, that he had no fears; she did not read the deepening furrows on his brow, and the thickening white in his hair correctly. "Men were different from women," she argued. "If they were left alone, they could bury things out of their sight—in time." She only wanted Alny. She could never have said, as his father did, even at the very first, "let him stay away." She was not at all sure whether he was not conniving at his son's absence—perhaps compelling him to prolong it. She had a mother's hunger; he had a father's pride.

Knowing nothing whatever of her husband's communications with the station master at Corrabuin, Mrs. Grale often wondered why she had no further word from the man. She threw out one or two hints to Mary Anne, who carelessly said that perhaps Allan had claimed the box. So, at last, Mrs. Grale made up her mind to write to the north herself, and say nothing about it to anybody.

But of writing anything like a business letter Mrs. Grale had almost a superstitious dread. Letter-writing at all was a great trial to her. She had done as little of it as possible, thereby letting old ties and friendships die out. It is difficult for people of cultivated minds and active habits to fully realise how trivial are the weights which drag down uneducated women, such as Mrs. Grale; or how these poor women let their hearts break and their lives fall into ruin for want of some slight action which would be counted among the other's every day work.

Mrs. Grale had put off writing that note of inquiry from day to day, and from week to week, always hoping that the morrow would bring news to make it unnecessary. But she braced herself at last to do it.

Remembering how promptly her first inquiries had been attended to, she was rather surprised when a whole week passed before any answer came from Corrabuin.

And when it did arrive, it brought a bitterness of disappointment beyond anything she could have anticipated. It stated that the station master had died just before Christmas, and that his successor, the present official, could find no trace of any such box or telegram as she referred to. He thought they had probably been fetched away. They were certainly not in Corrabuin station now.

As Mrs. Grale had gained her information secretly, so she had to adjust her ideas to it, in secret. It certainly did seem as though

Allan must have received his box and her telegram. If so, then surely she might infer that he was only carrying out some plans of his own staying away, and that he would come back some time. The hardest part of it all was, that he did not write.

So Mr. and Mrs. Grale sat together at their fireside, each nursing an inward trouble, which they concealed from the other. It was impossible to say what Mr. Grale knew of his son, whether anything or nothing, and what he suspected or did not suspect. He had never sought an interview with Edgar Vivian—as Dr. Palmer had suggested.

"Why do you not do it?" Dr. Palmer enquired of Mr. Grale, meeting him one day in a lane, shortly after his own interview with Edgar had taken place; and Mr. Grale's face had darkened at the question.

"It would be of no use," he answered. "I know human nature. He would deceive me where he could. And where he could not tell what facts I had on my side, he would take refuge behind dead silence, in the name of his own honour and his loyalty to his absent friend. Honour! Loyalty!" Mr. Grale repeated each word with intense contempt and bitterness.

"Look here, Doctor—it might bring danger if he spoke," went on Mr. Grale, dropping his voice to a low whisper and glancing over his shoulder to make sure they were alone. "Danger for himself and for Allan. He won't speak, and Allan keeps away for fear he should be made to do so."

Dr. Palmer wondered if this were true. It had struck him that, had he been in Edgar Vivian's place he should have sought out Mr. Grale of his own accord.

As for the family at Dering Court, their existence was full of monotony. General Vivian was out of present danger, but he was a decrepit old man now. He had ceased to chide his nephews for not making due stand and mark in life. He only clung to them, liking them about him. It was a satisfaction to him to know they were in the same house with himself. Certainly Edgar gave him little other satisfaction, for he shut himself into the library and buried himself among his books with a diligence that must have brought honourable results, had he exercised it during his college career. But George was very good to his uncle—good with that tenderness which in sweet, weak natures is often the growth of a too tardy self-reproach. But, when the General was able to walk about the house again and to sun himself on the terrace, George began to hint that he should like to take a little change of scene—a sea-breeze, a mountain scramble. But the General objected; and he entreated George piteously, almost tearfully, not to leave him—he was a poor old man—and nobody knew what a day might bring forth for such as he—and he could not trouble anybody long. George yielded without a murmur.

"I only wish you were settled in life, my boy," said the General,

dreamily. "Old people never feel quite sure about their juniors till that happens. I should like to see you safely settled before I go, George."

"Am I not safely settled?" George asked, rather wistfully. "Do you think, uncle, I shall ever dream of leaving this dear old place, or of changing it?"

"No, no," said the General, "not that. But I wish, George, that you had a wife."

"And yet you might not approve of her, if she existed," George remarked.

"I should not be hard to please," said the General. "I should not want fortune nor long descent, so long as she was a true lady, gently bred. And surely you could choose no other, George?"

"Men do make strange choices," said George, striving to speak lightly. He averted his face, gazing down the avenue, for they were seated on the terrace. "So many things occur to over-rule choice sometimes."

"That's nonsense," said the General. "If young men are rash and foolish, they must look to pay the penalty. It would be hard to expect a good family to welcome a vulgar bride fresh from her dairy, or a girl out of a milliner's shop. Where one unequal marriage turns out well, twenty turn out badly, nothing but misery on both sides. I'll tell you of one that turned out well, George; though there was trouble over that. My old friend, dead now, Randolph of Westerham, rashly married a gamekeeper's daughter; quite a romance it was, and she was a pretty creature, but her grammar and her style of good looks were not those of Westerham Grange, and the marriage was kept secret till there came a baby boy. Young Randolph cunningly contrived that in a year or two his father and mother should see the boy playing in one of the Westerham lanes, and he said to them (he was always clever), 'Would you not like such a grandson?' and when they both cried out, 'Yes, indeed we should,' he said, 'Then, there he is,' and told the truth, and was forgiven on the spot."

Mrs. Vivian had come up behind them. "You told your story so prettily, General," she said, "that I fear George might feel tempted to go and do likewise, only there is no romance left in young people in these degenerate days. Do you know of any young lady who married a footman, and was forgiven? That would make a pretty companion picture!"

The General did not answer, feeling that the question was only intended as a reproof. George asked presently: "What became of that young Mrs. Randolph?"

"Oh, they received her kindly at the Grange of course, under the circumstances. Though she did not live long, poor thing, and I dare-say it was as well. But the family always spoke of her with respect. Her son is the present squire."

But, although the General would not spare his nephew to be away

for any lengthened period, George contrived to get a few days' absence more than once. On each of these occasions he went to Edinburgh, having previously written to someone in the far North to meet him there.

Thus the weeks passed on, and the primroses and violets came out in the Dering lanes, and the trees were budding in the woods and hedges.

It happened that about this time Dr. Palmer was in attendance upon John Brice, the former head gardener at the Court. The old man lived in one of the lodges, opposite to that occupied by the gate-keeper and his family. He had been suffering from a smart attack of pleurisy, but was getting the better of it. One evening at dusk, when he was sitting up by fire-light in his easy chair, and Dr. Palmer had called in and was chatting with him, Allan Grale's name chanced to be incidentally mentioned.

Old Brice looked up suddenly. "He stays away a good time, sir, don't he?" remarked he.

"Pretty long," replied Dr. Palmer.

"I—I suppose he's all right, sir?" said the old man, hesitatingly.

"I suppose so. All right in what way do you mean?"

"I've thought of it over and over again since he doesn't come back; but—you remember that half-witted fellow, Sam Towne, who comes here by fits and starts trying to get work, don't you, sir?" Brice broke off to ask.

Dr. Palmer did remember.

"Sam was about the neighbourhood last autumn, picking up a job at late harvesting, and what not. When that was over, he tried to get taken on by Mr. Grale's gardeners to help in the greenhouses. One evening he came striding over here, right into this room, sir, to tell me he had lost the chance, for somebody else had been engaged. It was a little time after Mr. Allan Grale went away."

"Well?" cried Dr. Palmer, looking at the speaker.

"Perhaps talking of the Grales put him in mind of it, for he began telling me that one night, quite late, he had seen Mr. Allan and another gentleman at the Black Pool, having high words together. And he went on to say that they went on to blows, sir," continued Brice, after a slight pause; "or, anyway, to scuffle with one another, and that the one jumped into the Pool, or was flung in, Towne couldn't be sure which, for the moonlight shone on the other side of the Pool, and this side was in the shade; but he thought the one was Mr. Allan."

Dr. Palmer did not speak. He was recalling what Agnes had told him—that Miss Vivian feared Allan had committed suicide.

"Towne said it frightened him out of his wits—as if the soft had any wits to be frightened out of!—and he hid himself back amongst the trees. And the other gentleman made off, he said, and the one was left drowning. 'Twas a curious tale, sir!"

"Very curious," assented Dr. Palmer. "Do you think Towne related it to anyone besides yourself, Brice?"

"No, sir, I don't—I'm pretty sure he didn't. The next morning I spoke of it to Stephen up at the Court, and to Miss Vivian's maid, who's always very friendly with me. I thought what a dreadful thing it would be for the Grales if it was true, and I hardly liked to keep it all to myself. But that same afternoon while I was at tea, down came Stephen here to tell me it was nothing but one of that poor Sam Towne's weak fancies, or perhaps he might have had a drop of drink in him at the time; for that Mr. Allan Grale was safe and well in Scotland, and was writing letters to his folks at home. So I looked after Towne, and found him, and told him this, and I warned him never to repeat a word of his foolish tale if he didn't want to be had up for it and punished—and that scared him. He began to tremble, saying it must have been the fairies—who were always deceiving him."

"Do you know where Towne is now?"

"No, sir; I've never seen him since then. Whether it was the scare sent him, or that he couldn't find work, he went right off and away from Dering. But, Dr. Palmer——"

"Yes?" said the Doctor, kindly, for the old man had stopped. "What is it?"

"Well sir," said Brice, in a tone that seemed to have borrowed something of Sam Towne's scare, "now that the time has gone on all this long while, months of it, and Mr. Allan does not come back, and there seems to be no signs of him near nor far, I get asking myself, sitting all alone here in the gloaming when thoughts are deep, whether Sam Towne's tale was true."

(To be continued.)

A STORY OF THE DAY.

"I DO not like it, Ronald. It is too great a giving up of all your prospects for my sake."

The speaker, very young and girlish-looking, was lying on a sofa, while close by, looking fondly and anxiously down on her, sat a tall, soldier-like man in uniform. They were a great contrast in every way. She was a little woman, very fair, with dark violet eyes, an abundance of golden brown hair, and an appearance of excessive fragility: which accounted fully for the look of sadness mixed with love and protection, with which her husband was regarding her. He was very tall, standing over six foot, and dark; his hair and moustache were dark brown, and he had a pair of piercing dark grey eyes It was Captain Douglas. His expression was usually somewhat proud and stern; but at this moment it was softened into one of almost womanly sweetness and tenderness. The regiment was unfortunately stationed at S——, one of those spots of our foreign dependencies, where the climate is perniciously hot and enervating; and fears crossed him at times that it might be sapping away his wife's life.

"My dear Blanche," was his answer, "there is no giving up of prospects in the case. I shall infinitely prefer exchanging into a regiment now at home. No one could possibly have been more vexed than I was when we were sent out to serve her Majesty in this delectable quarter of the globe. I should like to have exchanged then and there, only that would hardly have done. And as for prospects ——"

He broke off here; he had been about to say: "There are not many prospects here, the chances are so slight of being called to active service." But he checked himself, remembering that what was the hope of his life, was the dread of his poor little wife's.

"Prospects are quite as good, and better, in a healthier climate," he continued. "I have quite decided. I shall go to-day to the Colonel, and ask him to write the necessary application for me. And then, please God, when we get back to bonnie England, I shall see the roses on my Blanche's cheeks again, as they were a year ago, when I married her!"

"But, Ronald"—and a blush came over her pale cheeks, as a reminder of what the roses *had* been—"I could not go to England at present, could I?"

"Not for the next two or three months. No, my dear, of course you could not; but as soon as possible after your confinement is over you shall go. As Dr. Spencer says, the sea voyage and the change from this oven to a cool, healthy climate, will be the very thing to restore

you to strength. So I have been thinking I had best make my arrangements at once, and get my application for an exchange sent off by the next mail."

"Have you settled what regiment you will try to exchange into?" she asked.

"Yes. Into the —th," he answered. "I think it could be done without trouble. Ferrars is in it, and I know he is wild to get moved abroad, no matter where. The last I heard of his regiment it was quartered at Dover, and seemed likely to remain there. It would be the very place for you, Blanche; the fresh breezes of the channel would soon bring back your roses, and ——"

Captain Douglas was interrupted by the entrance of Dr. Spencer, who had looked in every few days to see Mrs. Douglas since her health began to fail. The Captain drew him aside when he was leaving, and told him what he had resolved upon.

"I am heartily glad to hear it," said Dr. Spencer. "I do not hesitate to tell you that change of climate is the best hope for your wife's restoration, if not life. I should have ordered her to England long ago, had it not been that she so dreaded and shrank from the separation from you; and I feared the fretting would do her more harm than the climate."

"But she cannot travel until the child is born, can she?"

"Of course not; and you must not leave her here; pray, bear that in mind, when arranging your exchange."

"I know, I know. I should not think of leaving her. I shall send in my application at once. It will take some little time to arrange matters, and I can easily apply for a short leave, before joining another regiment. I want to be ready to take my wife home as soon as you shall say that it is safe for her to travel."

The Doctor nodded. He was turning to depart, when Captain Douglas touched his arm to detain him: his voice trembled, and his eyes were dimmed, strong and brave man though he was, as he spoke the question he wished to put.

"Tell me the truth, Doctor; I would rather know it. Do you think there is a reasonable hope that she will get through her trial safely?"

There was a pause, before Dr. Spencer answered, and when he did, a slight hesitation and want of confidence might have been observed in his tone.

"Captain Douglas, I hope for the very best," he said. "I cannot conceal from you that there is some danger from the excessive weakness to which this climate has reduced her; but on the other hand she is young, and it is in her favour that she is evidently very happy, and wishes with all her heart to live. I need hardly caution you," he continued, "to be most careful to keep every worry and annoyance from her, however slight; anything on her mind would be almost certainly fatal."

The soldier's face, which had been wearing an expression of the deepest sadness, now for an instant lighted up with a happy, confident smile, as he readily promised obedience to the Doctor's mandate. Keep all worry from her, his almost idolized wife? Aye, that would he indeed; no need to press this upon him.

A short year only had elapsed since he had made pretty Blanche Cameron his wife. She was an orphan, not without means of her own, but living with relations who understood her little and cared for her less. She had never known what it was to have anyone who cared to enter into any of her pursuits, or to whom she could confide her best thoughts and feelings, until she met Ronald Douglas. Their friendship quickly ripened into love on both sides, and after a short engagement she became his wife, and went out with him to S——, to which place his regiment had just been ordered.

I have not space here to tell how happy their married life was; how, after her lonely, neglected past, she valued his devotion and perfect sympathy, his unfailing courtesy; nor of how she returned his love, and strove to make his home happy. Their life was almost an ideal one, in its perfect confidence and affection. But alas, there was one trial from which all Ronald's care and devotion could not save her. Her health, which hitherto had been fairly good, though never robust, failed: she could not stand the enervating climate of S——; and, as we have heard from Dr. Spencer, the choice lay between sending her away from the husband who was all on earth to her, or allowing her to remain in a climate that was almost killing her. This had now ended in her husband having made up his mind to exchange if possible into a regiment stationed at home.

Captain Douglas lost no time. That same evening he went to his Colonel, with the intention of asking him to write the necessary application for leave to exchange. He found Colonel Deane at home, and in a few words made him acquainted with his errand. The Colonel expressed regret at the prospect of losing him from the regiment, in which he was a general favourite, both with officers and men, but quite agreed with the motives which had led him to come to this decision, and did not hesitate to comply with his request.

"Let me see," he said, speaking rapidly, "this is the 11th, the mail goes out on the 13th. I will write this letter to-day, Douglas, and if you will come down here to-morrow afternoon with two of your brother officers, in whose presence you will have to sign the necessary declaration that your motive for wishing to exchange is nothing affecting your honour, I will then have my letter ready for your enclosure.——And I heartily hope the change may completely restore Mrs. Douglas to health, though we shall miss you both greatly."

Ronald warmly thanked his Colonel, and took his leave. He did not then go in search of any of his brother officers, as the hour was getting late, and he knew Blanche would be nervous if left too long alone; he therefore hastened home, and found his wife somewhat

stronger than usual. He told her what he had done, or rather was about to do on the following day, and they talked for some time, planning their future life in dear old England, when Blanche should be restored to health and strength.

"I cannot help feeling grieved, though, Ronald," she said, "to think my health should oblige you to alter all your plans. I seem to fall so far below my own ideal of what a soldier's wife should be."

"And may I ask, little woman, what that ideal is?" he enquired, with an amused smile. "Then perhaps I can tell you if you fall so very far short of it."

"She should be always a help to her husband, never a hindrance," replied Blanche. "She should never allow private feeling to interfere with his duty; for as it is her husband's duty to put the honour of his sovereign and country before all earthly considerations, even before those of the closest earthly ties, so she, being one with him, should do likewise."

"Anything more?"

"Yes. If he has to encounter privation, hardship, or danger, in the pursuit of his calling, her voice should be the first to urge him onwards; and under no circumstance should she seek by weak murmurs to withhold him from the smallest particle of his duty as a soldier. I think that a wife should always identify herself with the spirit of her husband's profession, whatever it be; therefore to a soldier's wife, the watchwords of her life should be 'Honour, duty, and obedience!'"

"Well done, Blanche!" said Ronald, looking admiringly at her, as the colour came into her cheeks, and her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm. "And, my child," he added, "I don't think you fall far short of your ideal."

"Oh, Ronald, I fear I do! A soldier's wife should be brave at heart; while I—I feel I should be a very coward, if—if ——"

She could not finish her speech, or speak her meaning aloud. Neither was there any need for it. Ronald knew well what, in spite of her brave words, was the dread of her life, as it must be that of every soldier's wife.

He turned the conversation into a less exciting topic, and presently made her go to her room. Then he strolled out before the house to enjoy a cigar, and think over what had to be done on the morrow. That it was a bitter disappointment to himself to settle down at home into an inactive life was nothing; his wife was, and always would be, his first consideration.

At the appointed hour on the morrow afternoon he was again at Colonel Deane's; the two officers to whom he had applied, Major Carruthers and Captain Ainslie, following close upon him. When the Colonel appeared his face wore a look of concern.

"Douglas, my dear fellow," he said, "I am so sorry to have misled you. We reckoned yesterday, you know, that the mail went out to-

morrow, but in fact it is this evening that it goes out. I cannot think how I came to make such a mistake."

They smiled inwardly. No man in the regiment, except the Colonel, could have made it; for the coming in and going out of the mails was the one break in their monotonous life, eagerly looked forward to and calculated upon; but the absent-mindedness of Colonel Deane was amusing, and always allowed for.

"I knew the mail came in to-day from England—and, by the way, my letters and papers are this minute delivered—but I'm sure I thought to-morrow was the day it went out," continued the Colonel. "Will a week's delay matter much to you, Douglas?"

"There need not be any delay, Colonel," answered Captain Douglas. "There's plenty of time to write the application and post it by this evening's mail, if you have no objection."

"Is there? Well, let us get to it then," said the relieved Colonel. "My letter is already written."

The business was soon finished, for Colonel Deane was anxious to get to his letters and see what news the mail had brought him. Ronald's signature, and those of his two brother officers, were affixed to the document which was to accompany the Colonel's letter, and the whole was sealed in readiness.

"Shall I send it to the post with my own despatches?" said the Colonel, in good nature; and Douglas thanked him and acquiesced.

The three young men then wished Colonel Deane good evening, and went out together. "I am awfully sorry we are going to lose you, old fellow," remarked Major Carruthers. "I suppose it is on account of Mrs. Douglas's health."

"Yes; entirely. Otherwise I should never have thought of leaving the dear old regiment, for I love it heartily, and sincerely wish I had at least once been called on to fight for its colours before I left them."

"Aye, yes; no doubt. Well, it's a great pity."

As Major Carruthers spoke, he was opening a newspaper which he had taken from his pocket, remarking that he had not yet read a word of news, for the letters were only delivered to him as he was coming out.

"I say, Douglas," he exclaimed, after glancing at the paper for a minute in silence, "Did I see on your papers—I hardly took it in—that the regiment you wish to exchange into is the —th?"

"Yes," replied Captain Douglas. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, I—I was wondering whether you know that it is ordered out to Egypt?—It says so here," touching his *Times*.

"Says what? I don't understand."

"The —th, which you have applied to join, is under orders for Egypt," repeated the Major, speaking gravely. "I was thinking of Mrs. Douglas. You will have to go straight to Egypt."

"Ordered to Egypt—what to the relief of Khartoum and all the

rest of it!" gleefully cried Captain Ainslie, who was a young, unmarried officer, full of spirit and daring. "Oh, Douglas, you are in luck! Don't I wish I had had the chance! Of all expeditions, one to rescue that glorious man, Gordon, would be the most to my taste."

A warning glance from the Major checked his ill-timed excitement. He was a husband himself, and understood better than the young and thoughtless fellow the struggle which must be taking place in Ronald Douglas's breast.

They parted then, for Captain Douglas wished them good day somewhat abruptly.

"Why, what has come over Douglas?" cried the younger man to the Major, when they were alone. "I should have thought he, of all men in the regiment, would have been overjoyed at the prospect of seeing active service, and we all know what a hero Gordon is to him. Did you see how he looked? Surely he cannot be showing the white feather?"

"The white feather!" was the other's indignant reply. "How dare you mention such a thing in connection with Douglas? Every one of us knows, or ought to know, that his courage is dauntless and his honour unsullied. But do you forget that he almost idolizes his young wife, and that she is in so precarious a state of health that the news of to-night may possibly be her death blow?"

"I never thought of that," replied Ainslie, repenting his hasty words. "What do you think he will do? He is not absolutely pledged in honour to join the —th, is he?"

The Major screwed up his lips. "I cannot say; it is a nice point; but, whatever may be his decision, *I*, for one, shall be sure that it is good and honourable."

In the meanwhile, poor Ronald Douglas was going towards home, a chaos of thoughts whirling in his brain; of which perhaps the only one standing out in a distinct shape was, that he must hurry back to Blanche, who might, and probably would, have already made the discovery—for she was sure to have opened some of the newspapers just delivered. In her weak state, it would certainly throw her into a fearful state of agitation.

And *he* must soothe her—but how? By telling her that he would give up the idea of joining the —th?—that there might be yet time to get back his letter from the Colonel before it was posted—that he, Ronald Douglas, whose whole heart lay in his profession, who had all an English soldier's horror of the merest semblance of cowardice or dishonour, would tell his Colonel he wished to give up the regiment he had fixed upon, because it was ordered to the rescue of one of the noblest souls that England ever knew, of one who was his own ideal of all that was best and noblest on earth—at once the truest Christian and bravest soldier this age has known—the saintly and heroic Gordon? *How* could he do this?

But was there not another side to the picture? Words that he

had heard but the previous day from Dr. Spencer rang in his ears: "Any worry or annoyance would be almost certainly fatal; you must keep all such from her."

His Blanche! his fondly-loved wife, whom he had vowed before heaven to love and cherish: could he now, when her need of him was sorest; when the claim on his love and care which her impending illness alone would have given her—could he leave her to cruel suspense and anguish in the knowledge that he had gone forth to stand at the battle's front, before the cannon's mouth?—and so kill her, as it would do! Was this the way he would keep those vows made to her but one short year ago? But, still—his duty, his honour—which way did it call him? Captain Douglas pressed his hand to his brow, and wondered whether ever man had been called upon to make so grievous a decision.

He had reached home now, and, for the first time since they were married, dreaded to find himself in his wife's presence.

One thing was clear to him; he must not harass her with his doubts. His first words to her must either be light words of comfort and encouragement in the trial in store for them; or else those of assurance that, come what may, he would not leave her. In the latter case he must never let her see him cast a backward glance of regret, though he himself felt that the sense of gnawing shame and humiliation would never leave him, even though he might have the opportunity at some future time ——

But no, no; he could not even for Blanche's sake do this thing! How could he face the half-veiled sneers of his brother officers? What would his brave Colonel think, he who himself had fought shoulder to shoulder with Gordon in the Crimea? Could he let the shade of dishonour taint his dead father's name—he, a Douglas; a member of one of the oldest and proudest families of North Britain, who counted descent from him who fell fighting by his King's side at Flodden?

It was impossible. Yet—his bonnie Blanche; his loving little wife; who had only him to cling to in all the world; who never failed, however weak and ill she might be, to have a sweet smile and cheerful word for him! Was *his* hand to be the one to ——

As his step was heard, entering, the English maid whom Blanche had brought out with her came forward. "My mistress wishes to see you directly, sir."

She knew then; the blow had fallen! He turned and went to her at once, his decision still unmade. He found her standing facing the door, with a face white as marble, but somehow more serene and composed than his. All at once she smiled; and the smile was infinitely more touching than tears would have been. Clinging to him she spoke:

"Ronald, I know what you have to tell me."

"You know it, Blanche?"

"Yes, I saw it announced here," pointing to the open paper which lay on the table. "And, Ronald," she added, quite firmly, though very low, "I will not make your duty harder for you by my weakness. I *know* you must go, and I will not seek to hold you back. I fear I was very wrong at first when I read it; it was a shock, an awful shock, Ronald; and I do not know what you will think of me, dear, for I felt tempted to implore you to give it up, and fix on some other regiment; but I soon remembered you could not in honour do such a thing. And then I recalled our conversation of only yesterday; and I knew that the time had now come for me to prove that my words were not mere words—a vain boast and nothing else."

He clasped her in his arms, whispering: "Well done, my Blanche! you are the right stuff for a soldier's wife." And the strong man felt that his delicate, timid wife had been nobler and stronger than he; though, perhaps, the temporary weakness of the one and the unusual strength of the other came from the same source: that one great power, stronger than all ambition, yet overcoming the weakest woman's fears—love. "Love strong as death, love which casts out self."

The harrowing details of the parting must be passed over. I fear many a wife has such details only too fresh upon her mind. It came all too soon, that parting—for in these days momentous orders are flashed over the world by telegram. Blanche held up bravely to the last, her parting words to her husband being in answer to what she knew were his unspoken fears.

"Ronald, please God, I will try my very utmost to live, for your sake."

But when, a few minutes later, Doctor Spencer came in, as he promised Captain Douglas to do, he found her stretched senseless on the floor.

Neither will the details of that campaign be told here, and indeed it needs it not; for who does not know, almost by heart each stirring scene in the sad history?

Ronald Douglas was in Stewart's column, and fought under him in the tiny square at Abu Klea, where 1,500 of our men routed 10,000 of the enemy; and again at Metemmeh, where the gallant commander fell, pierced with what proved to be his death wound—fell, like a worthy follower of him they were seeking to save, in the performance of an act of thoughtful kindness and consideration for those fighting under him. And then Douglas was among the little band who went on with Sir Charles Wilson to the very gates of Khartoum, to find they had arrived, alas, too late.

All was over. Deprived of the steamers, which it had been the last crowning act of Gordon's unselfish life to send away from him, for the sake of others, in his sorest need, he had fallen by wicked treachery; and, while this world should last, the eye of mortal man would never look on Gordon again!

But for many days we knew it not. Hope lingered in all hearts, only to be dispelled. And at length the truth forced itself on us all, that surely and truly, though we may never know for certain how, or by whose hand, that gallant man had fallen, and alone. With none of his own race or faith near him, the martyr-hero had gone to meet his God.

Time passed. Not so very long subsequent to that tragedy, Captain Douglas was wounded in the arm; not dangerously, but enough to disable him from taking any further present share in the campaign. An attack of fever supervened, sufficiently grave to cause the doctors to order him home as soon as he should be fit to travel.

During all this while he had received many letters both of and from his wife. At first from her; letters written in a strain of cheerful, loving hope. Then came a day he never forgot, when a telegram arrived for him, from Dr. Spencer, and at the sight he, who could face the enemy's fiercest fire steadily and unmoved, trembled like a weak woman.

It proved, however, to contain these words: "All well over; no cause for alarm."

This was followed by one or two more, all to the same cheering effect; and, in due course, by a letter from Mrs. Deane, the Colonel's wife, telling Ronald about his little son, and that Mrs. Douglas was far better than could have been expected. Though very weak, she was bearing up well, was brave and hopeful.

Almost before it was quite prudent, Dr. Spencer sanctioned the departure of Mrs. Douglas for England. He was anxious to get her away from that enervating climate; and she was anxious to travel under the escort of an officer who was going home on leave with his wife. The voyage did her no harm, and they arrived in safety.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon of a day in this present year, that a fly stopped before the door of a house in a healthy sea-side resort in old England.

The occupant, a young man with one arm in a sling, but otherwise healthy-looking, for he had picked up wonderfully during his home-coming, leaped out of the fly and knocked at the door; asking as soon as it was opened for Mrs. Douglas.

"This way, sir," said the servant; and, leading him through the hall, she opened the door of a drawing-room, and left him in it with his wife and child.

Blanche was standing with her baby in her arms, dressed in white, a soft lace cap with a pale blue ribbon-trimming on her pretty, golden brown hair. She was painfully thin, though her eyes sparkled, and her cheeks, for the moment at least, were lit up as by a bright, crimson rose. In one bound he crossed the room.

"Blanche!"

"Ronald!"

And in those words, spoken together, each seemed to tell the story of what these months of separation and anxiety had been; and in that moment Blanche felt repaid a thousand-fold for her noble sacrifice and for all her suffering, as she held their child up for its father's first kiss. It was indeed one of those moments when this earth seems lit by a ray from Eden, by a foretaste of paradise! But, oh, may a merciful Heaven help those wives of our Soudan heroes, Burnaby, Earle, Eyre, Stewart, and others, for whom such a meeting never came.

"You had him christened before you started, Blanche," observed Ronald, as they were at length soberly sitting down.

"Yes, dear. I should like to have waited for you; but I could not bring him away without it."

"Of course not. What have you named him?"

"I have named him," she answered, smiling, "after my two greatest heroes: the names I thought worthiest to go together—'Ronald Gordon.'"

He smiled. "My child, you attach more honour to me than I deserve. But I am glad you have called the boy after that good and brave man."

"Oh, Ronald, if you could have brought him back!" she exclaimed. "It seems so piteous, his dying all alone, and being buried we know not where! I used to like to picture with what enthusiasm he would be received in England—what honours his Queen and country would lavish on him!"

"True, my love," answered Ronald, gravely, "it is most sad, most piteous. But for our comfort let us remember that he was one who hated and shrank from all earthly honours, and we cannot doubt that ere now he has been amply rewarded for his 'faithfulness unto death;' and that, though his body lies we know not where in the lonely desert, yet that his grand, unselfish soul is resting after his untiring toil."

> "'Where loyal hearts and true stand ever in the light,
> All rapture through and through, in God's most holy sight,'"

breathed Mrs. Douglas.

There was silence between them for a few minutes, and then Ronald spoke in a lighter tone.

"If our child had been a girl, Blanche, and you had called it Blanche Gordon, I think it would have been a worthier coupling of names than the other is."

She blushed with mingled pleasure and humility.

"Ronald, for shame! How can you compare *me*, your foolish little wife, to General Gordon! Why I am afraid of everything, from a big dog to a black beetle."

"I compare you for this reason, Blanche: that, as I take it, the key note to all Gordon's heroism was his complete self-abnegation;

and I think I saw a worthy imitation of that spirit a few months ago, when my wife, in her hour of utmost weakness and need of me, was the one to send me from her to my duty."

"Ah, Ronald, you never knew then how I wavered, how I came into your presence that night in so miserable a state of indecision, that *one* word from you would have led me to fall from what I felt to be my duty. And if I had done so, I do not think I should ever have known an hour's happiness again."

"And now," he added, kissing her fondly and reverently, "let me thank you, my own true wife and help-meet, for having *helped*, not *hindered* me in duty's path. I hope, and think, that by your example and influence, we may lead our boy to follow in the footsteps of him for whom all England mourns; for it is to mothers like you, Blanche, brave through their perfect unselfishness, that we must look, to train up for us sons like Gordon."

MARY DOVETON HODGES.

REMEMBRANCE.

(WORDS FOR MUSIC.)

WAKE not, ah, wake not, voices of my playtime,
Echoes that slumber, music that is gone
Blossom and bud not, branches of the May-time
Changes that change not, as the years run on!

Vain, ah, in vain! While forward pressing ever,
Fain would I close the past that lies behind,
Candid and cold, the Spring-time lights discover
Buds on old boughs, old tones upon the wind.

Eyes, ah, sad eyes, strain on into the distance,
Turn not to gaze o'er the fair scene outspread;
Ears, though ye catch the old sweet sound's insistance,
Heed not the dead past singing o'er its dead!

There are glad eyes for every bud's new setting,
Ears fain to hear gay Fancy's voice beguile.
Ah, give me but a rest and a forgetting,
Till I can face Remembrance with a smile.

G. B. STUART.

ON THE SUPERNATURAL.*

THAT in the face of so many well authenticated facts respecting supernatural agency, anyone can be found to doubt its existence, seems surprising. But the fear of being ridiculed as weak-minded doubtless prevents many people from acknowledging what in their heart of hearts they really believe.

The subject of apparitions, of unaccountable noises, and the like, which has lately occupied more than usual attention, is one which must always remain a mystery, while we are in this state of existence.

That the departed have appeared to the living we have an authentic proof, handed down to us from St. Matthew's account of our Lord's crucifixion, when—"The graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." In other passages of Scripture spiritual appearances are spoken of—notably that of Samuel, raised by the witch of Endor.

That it is not given to all people—indeed, but to very few, speaking comparatively—to see or hear the supernatural, is a fact not to be disputed. But those to whom the gift (can it be called so?) is given, could relate experiences which have occurred to them at different times throughout their lives.

In the winter of 186—, business called me to London from the West of England. The weather was anything but inviting: dark, dismal days, dense fogs, and drizzling rain. I hoped to combine some little pleasure with business, by paying a few visits to friends.

The first days of my stay in town were to be spent in Wimpole Street, Cavendish Square.

A rising medical man and his wife had just moved from a house in that same street to one higher up, in which every thing had still to be arranged, but they begged me to go to them all the same.

Upon my arrival in London in the afternoon, I had to go straight to a lawyer's office, and was there two hours; so that on reaching Wimpole Street I was tired and weary. But when my good host and his wife came forward with their warm welcome, and I saw the cheerful fires and bright lights in the still unsettled rooms, and presently sat down to the well-served dinner, I forgot all my fatigue and felt fully renovated. We had much to chat about, mutually recalling past associations and imparting later news; and it was midnight ere we retired to rest.

I must confess that my first impressions of the house were not favourable. To me there seemed to be an indescribable gloom

* The Author vouches for the absolute truth and correctness of the facts recorded in this paper.

pervading almost every part of it — which the bright and tasteful decorations and new furniture did not serve to dispel. The chamber which I was to occupy—the only available one in this transition state of affairs—was that intended for the little daughter of the house, when things should have settled themselves. It was situated at the end of a very long corridor: and the corridor, as I went down it, struck upon me with more gloom than anything had yet done. Close to the door of this, my room, shut in by another door, was a staircase; leading, I found, to other apartments above.

The room was not yet fully furnished. The head of the bed, a small one, was near the window, the right side of it being against the wall which separated this room from what was to be the guest-chamber: a room which as yet was empty. I undressed quickly and got into bed.

But scarcely had I lain down, before I was conscious of some unseen presence—and of a heavy breathing, or panting, close to my ear.

Not a little alarmed, I quickly turned my head in the direction of the sounds, in order to discover whence they proceeded—when they instantly appeared to be on the opposite side of me.

Springing out of bed I lighted my candle and looked about. I examined the bed; there was nothing in or about it. I examined the room, every corner of it; the cupboard; underneath the bed, every where. Even the chimney, I looked up and searched. What I thought was that some domestic animal of the house, a cat or a dog, might have been shut into the room unseen. But no; there was nothing. All this time the loud breathing had continued; now in this part of the room, now in that; and once or twice so close to me that it seemed as though I felt the breath upon my cheek.

After another thorough search, with no result, I came to the lame conclusion that the sounds must proceed from outside the door, and that the room must possess some unusual and extraordinary properties for the reproduction of sound. Feeling completely chilled, I again got into bed—but not to sleep.

No sooner had I laid my head on the pillow, than there arose a noise in the next room, the empty room intended for the future guest-chamber. It was as if a long whip were being flicked on the bare boards; and then the most awful groans I ever heard appeared to proceed from the room over head, as from some one in mortal agony.

This alarmed me more than I can express, and I knew not what to do, for I was unwilling to disturb my friends. How long the groans continued I cannot tell; I only know that I lay in distress and terror, vainly trying to imagine some plausible cause for it. As they subsided, an idea struck me that possibly the room over head might be occupied by one or two of the maids, whose beds might be on the floor until bedsteads could be put up, that one of them had been taken ill and that the groans came from her. I *tried to think this.* And so I lay shivering until the day began to dawn, when I fell asleep.

When the housemaid brought the hot water in the morning, I enquired who had slept in the next room. "No one, ma'am," was the reply. "It is to be the spare room, but it is not yet furnished."

"Who occupies the next house?" I said again.

"It is unoccupied," was the girl's answer: "it is to be let."

"Does anyone sleep in the room over this?" I next continued.

"No, ma'am, not yet," said the maid. "We are all at sixes and sevens, you see, just for a day or two, but the rooms will soon be in order."

I made no further remark to her. But on going down to breakfast and being asked how I had slept, I related the foregoing circumstances.

"Oh! a haunted chamber," said my host, laughing, "without doubt, a haunted chamber."

"Haunted or not haunted," I replied, "you will not find me sleeping there again; therefore you must pardon me if I leave you this evening instead of on Saturday." They thought I was joking: but I assured them I was in earnest.

"What," said the Doctor, a merry twinkle in his eye, "do you mean to confess you are going to be frightened away from us by ghosts and goblins?"

"Yes—but I am very sorry for it."

"Nonsense," he continued. "The noises you heard must have proceeded from M." (his little daughter). "Children do make queer noises sometimes, and scream frightfully if awakened suddenly from sleep."

I shook my head.

"I assure you when M. is not well she does make a most unearthly noise—and I thought her feverish last night. Why, you surely would never leave us for such a bagatelle as that! If you hear anything to-night, just come and knock at my door."

All this sounded plausible, if not convincing. Still it did seem rather an insufficient reason for leaving. Moreover, I must be prepared to be laughed at by my friends at Carlton Road, to whom I was going next; so I said I would remain. As to the chamber, in the day time it seemed as quiet a room as could be.

The second night I thought it best to retire in good time, so as to be, if possible, asleep before the Doctor and his wife went to their room; and I did so, making fatigue my excuse.

I undressed without any interruption, and not only lay down in bed without any repetition of the breathing or other noises of the previous night, but was actually asleep by half-past ten o'clock.

I was not destined to remain long in peace. At midnight the same dreadful breathing close to my ear aroused me, not only from my comfortable and much-needed sleep, but also to a consciousness of my folly in having allowed myself to be talked into venturing to spend another night in that room.

Rising immediately, with the intention of calling my friends, I was just at the point of putting my hand on the handle of the door, when the most terrific shriek I ever heard in my life rang through the long corridor. Immediately after, apparently close outside my room, there was a noise as of two people in deadly struggle—which ended in both appearing to fall together against the door.

Never shall I forget the thrill of horror which ran through me at that moment. Rushing forward—for I had drawn back in fear—to turn the key against them, I stood almost paralysed; lest, failing in my nervousness to lock the door at once, the attention of those outside should be attracted. My fears of the supernatural had changed into other fears—I thought there were thieves in the house. So I stayed cowering where I was, hardly daring to breathe. What the mortal terror of that moment was I cannot write.

To bed I could not return; the heavy breathing still followed me about the room. Lighting a second night-light in addition to the one already alight, and putting one on each end of the mantel-piece, I dressed myself, moved the dressing-table from the window, drew up the blind, and sat shivering until half-past six o'clock the next morning, when day was just beginning to dawn.

The dreary monotony of that fearful night, only broken every hour by the measured step of the almost invisible policeman going his rounds, to whom more than once I felt almost irresistibly impelled to call—can never be forgotten. My head was constantly turned in the direction from whence the breathing came, expecting every moment to *see*, as well as hear. But that, I am thankful to say, I was spared.

In the morning I told my friends, as before, what had happened, and also repeated my determination not to spend another night in that room, at which the Doctor only laughed, professing to believe all to be the result of my imagination. But his wife looked grave.

The business which had called me to London detained me nearly the whole of that day in the City, and it was almost six o'clock before I returned to Wimpole Street, tired and chilled, and by no means desiring to change my quarters that night.

After dinner I held to my resolve of leaving them, and going at once to my other friends at Carlton Road, Kilburn. The Doctor laughed more than ever, and declared that he would not hear of my leaving them for so ridiculous a reason. He appealed to my bravery and strength of mind; but I told him that another night passed in that room would jeopardise my senses.

"Well, look here," said he at length; "you shall sleep with M."—his wife—"you cannot, I am sure, object to stay on these terms!"

"Very well," I replied, "to that I consent willingly—provided the room you take shall be the one I have slept in these two nights."

"Oh, to be sure," he answered, gaily; "I'll take the haunted chamber. In fact, I've no choice; for there's not any other ready."

So I remained, not at all sorry to escape turning out that bitterly cold night. But even under the new arrangement, rest in that house for me was out of the question after my late experience.

In the morning, Mrs. —— went to the room at my request, to enquire of her husband how he had slept. Not at all, he answered her; there had been most extraordinary noises throughout the night, which he believed proceeded from the water-pipes. But as I had never known water-pipes to breathe, shriek, or wrestle, I did not accept his solution of the mystery.

The Doctor did not make his appearance at breakfast. The servant in waiting said her master had taken a cup of tea in haste, and was gone out to see a patient. But I strongly suspected he had gone out to avoid meeting me, and the questions I should have been sure to put to him.

I had to be out again on my way to the lawyer's before he returned; and the subject was never after alluded to between us. But when I was leaving, in the afternoon, and he had again gone out, his wife spoke to me.

"I will candidly tell you," she said, "that the servants say they hear all sorts of noises, and that they are quite sure the house is haunted! Of course, we are not supposed to believe it, and, therefore, only laugh at their stories."

"Were I you I should leave the house," I said.

"We cannot," she answered, shaking her head. "Unhappily we have taken a lease of it, and had carpets and other furniture made to fit it. We must remain in it."

And remain in it they did, for several years. Though how they could do so is to me a marvel; for, apart from all this, it is the most gloomy and depressing house possible to conceive. Perhaps they shut that room up: I don't know.

About twenty years have elapsed now since the occurrence of what I have related, yet it is all as fresh in my memory as though it had taken place but yesterday. I have simply stated the facts as they occurred, without exaggeration of any kind, adhering only to the strict truth.

As before remarked, most people profess to look upon a belief in anything supernatural as a positive weakness: but I am perfectly satisfied in my own mind of a very close connection between the seen and the unseen, and that the disturbances in that house were wholly due to supernatural causes. Unhappily it has not been my only experience.

Some years later I was staying at Ilfracombe, and while there received a letter from one of my sisters, who was then abroad, telling me of the serious illness of her husband.

He was a fine, strong man of upwards of six feet, of whose life anyone would have taken a lease. His was one of those bright and genial natures one delights to meet, full of kindness and sympathy,

always ready to study the wishes of others rather than his own: and who carried sunshine with him wherever he went.

A short time after the receipt of the letter, I had just stepped into bed one night, and was in the act of lying down, when I heard the low, distinct, steady step as of a large man advancing towards my door, and stop on the mat outside.

As we were the only lodgers, and there was no man whatever in the house, and I knew that everybody was in bed, I felt rather alarmed; for the door, contrary to my usual custom, was not locked. I sat up for a minute or two, quite still, my eyes fixed on the door handle, expecting every moment to see it turn, and someone walk in; but there was no further sound outside. I got out of bed, opened the door, and looked out. Nothing, however, was to be seen but the darkness of the passage; and the stillness of death seemed to reign throughout the house.

Closing the door more quickly than I had opened it, and taking care this time to lock it, I again retired to bed, but only to be kept awake until daylight by a succession of the most unaccountable noises it is possible to conceive; noises so significant that each seemed to articulate its own special message, in a way which none can understand but those who have gone through similar experiences.

I had never passed such a night, with the exception of those two nights in Wimpole Street; and trust I may never pass such another.

In the morning the circumstances were entered in my diary; and when a letter, announcing the death of my brother-in-law, reached me, I referred to them. I was startled to find that he died the very same night; and, as far as could be judged, allowing for the difference of time, at the very hour when I had heard the steps approaching my door.

The following was told me by his widow, three or four years afterwards.

Like many who have lived much abroad, my sister is a great advocate for open doors and plenty of fresh air, and consequently always sleeps with her bedroom door wide open.

Her only little daughter slept in a cot beside her mother's bed; and one night—or rather morning, for it was almost two o'clock a.m. —my sister was aroused by hearing a man enter her room, and walk straight to the dressing-table. It was quite dark, and as she never burns a light she was unable to *see* anything.

Greatly alarmed, thinking it was a burglar and anxious to hear a sound, even of the child's voice, she said, scarcely above a whisper, not knowing whether the little thing was awake or not: "Will Florrie come into mamma's bed?"

Instantly, *and without uttering a word*, the child bounded into her mother's bed, where she lay trembling in her arms, much alarmed

evidently, and apparently unable to get over her tremor or to go to sleep. Neither mother nor child spoke a word ; but when the day began to dawn the little one said : " Mamma, I did hear that man come into the room and go to the dressing-table." Her mother had never said a word about what she had heard, nor as to why she had asked her whether she would go into her bed.

Certain it is that there was no burglar in the house, and it is impossible that what I have related could be due to any other than the supernatural.

Two very singular occurrences took place just at the time of my mother's death, which it is impossible to account for otherwise than as the result of the same agency.

Being very weary, and almost worn out with long watching by my dear mother's dying bed, the night after all was over I retired to rest early, after having carefully extinguished the lights.

My bedstead was a small tent, with white dimity hangings, a valance hanging round the tester. From sheer fatigue and exhaustion I quickly fell asleep, and never once woke until the bright morning sun made its way through the curtains.

On opening my eyes, the first thing I saw, which alarmed me not a little, was the counterpane covered with tinder, the centre of the tester of the bed being completely burned away, leaving only festoons of the burnt dimity hanging round the inside of the wooden frame, with the valance outside untouched and uninjured.

The fire had evidently originated in the *centre* of the tester, and it is *quite impossible* that any spark from a candle could have reached it. Had it been one of the curtains which was so burnt, this might have been the case, but the curtains were untouched. How it was possible for me, for anyone, to have slept through the *glare* and *heat* which must have been produced by such a fire is most mysterious. Yet I was perfectly unconscious of both ; and that I escaped being burnt to death seems little short of a miracle.

About a fortnight after this occurrence, an equally strange and unaccountable one took place ; it was in the same room, which was a very cheerful one, looking out on to the lawn.

The house, which was our own, was an old one ; that is, the main building, which had been added to, and had the name of being haunted. Very many strange and unaccountable noises were certainly heard in it, but in the room in question nothing had ever before occurred to shake the weakest nerves.

I was packing, preparatory to leaving the old home for ever. There was a large china plateau, which I much prized ; and, being anxious for its safety, decided on packing it in a chest of linen, instead of with the other china. It was taken to my room the night before it was to have been packed, and rested on its edge against the wardrobe.

When I rose in the morning it was lying on the floor in a hundred

pieces, like so many lumps of sugar. And yet no sound whatever had disturbed me during the night, though I am always a particularly light sleeper.

Never will the sight of that broken dish be forgotten. Had it rolled down, it *might* have been broken into several pieces, but it *could* not, from such a cause, have been broken as it was. It looked exactly as though it had been *hammered* into bits.

Strange as it may sound, it does sometimes appear that there are cases in which the departed are concerned in the things of earth, after they have quitted it.

I knew of an instance where a gentleman, entrusted with a secret of great moment by a friend, under a most solemn promise never to divulge it, very improperly committed his friend's statement to paper —which he placed between the leaves of a book in his library—and dying without having destroyed it, he for years constantly appeared in that room, always looking with a most distressful expression towards one particular shelf. At length a member of the family, more courageous than the rest, determined to speak to the apparition, and enquire the cause of his appearing and his seeming distress. He did so. The cause of his disquiet was revealed and the volume which contained the manuscript pointed out, with directions for its being immediately burnt, without being looked at. This was done, and he never appeared after, assuring his relative that now he could rest. And this reminds me of a strange thing which happened in Ireland.

A vessel with troops had been lost off Tramore, and one of those who had perished was the wife of a sergeant; she had married him against the consent of her parents. The father, who lived in another county, and had never been to Tramore in his life, had a vision, in which his daughter appeared to him and begged him to go and have her body removed from a spot which she indicated, saying that she was buried in the sand, and could not rest, as a man's arm was thrown across her chest. She also told her father that he would find the certificate of her marriage in her pocket.

He started for Tramore, making known the object of his journey on the way, so that very many people accompanied him, anxious to know the result of his search. Arrived at the spot on the sands which he had seen in the vision, he had the sand removed; and there, as she had told him, lay the body of his child, with the arm of a man, who had been washed in at the same time, thrown across her chest. The certificate of her marriage was in her pocket.

The excitement at Waterford, Tramore, and all the adjacent towns was very great. The strangest part of it was that the man's arm thrown across the woman should prevent her being able to rest.

I remember another strange story, which I heard many years ago, when living at Waterford, from the lady herself, Miss F—— B——.

When quite young, she became engaged to a gentleman in the army, and some time after his regiment was ordered to India.

They were both anxious that the marriage should take place before Mr. S —— embarked ; but the young lady's father would not hear of it until his future son-in-law had obtained his promotion (he being at that time only a lieutenant) and should be in a more suitable position to marry. When that time arrived, he might return to Ireland to claim his bride.

Before they parted, Miss B—— gave him a favourite spaniel, to which they were both attached, making him promise never, under any circumstances, to part with it.

One night, some time after Lieutenant S—— had sailed, Miss B—— was awakened by the curtains at the right hand side of her huge four-post bed being drawn apart. Standing there, in full-dress uniform, with the spaniel under his arm, she saw her friend the lieutenant.

He spoke not, but, fixing his eyes on her with a sad and sorrowful expression, after some little time vanished.

Miss B—— mentioned the circumstance to her family in the morning, and made a note of the day and hour.

As soon as a sufficient time had elapsed for a letter to reach them, they received the sad tidings that Lieutenant S—— had died of fever, almost immediately after his arrival in India, and on the very day and at the very hour at which he appeared to Miss B——.

These are strange facts, but they are mysteries which we cannot penetrate or attempt to understand.

The appearing of Lieutenant S—— was strange ; but to my mind the appearing of the dog was stranger still, as that was doubtless alive and in India. It is useless to speculate on these things ; but the facts are incontrovertible.

There is yet another instance which comes to my mind, though somewhat different from the foregoing, inasmuch as the person who appeared was still living.

The lady was an aunt of my own, my father's only sister ; she was a very beautiful woman, who had married, when scarcely more than fourteen, a man nearly three times her own age. The marriage was an unhappy one ; and six years of wretchedness brought her to an early grave, when she had scarcely completed her twenty-first year. She was really ill only a few weeks ; and the end drew on so rapidly that the doctor expected every time he went to the house to find that all was over.

On the morning of the day she died, as the servant opened the front door to the doctor (till then quite a sceptic in such matters), he declared that he distinctly saw my aunt leave the dining-room, and walk upstairs. Not only so, but he heard the rustle of her silk dress in passing up the staircase.

Greatly astonished, he asked the servant how it was that his mistress was down stairs, when he had not expected to find her living.

"My mistress down stairs, sir," said the man, looking perplexed and alarmed. "Why, nurse did not think she would live till morning!"

She was still living, however, but died that night.

I will now only add one or two more cases, where the departed have appeared to the living.

While nursing a beloved brother during his last illness, I went to my room one morning, after a night of anxious watching, in order to obtain the refreshment of a bath and hair-brushing, so desirable at all times after fatigue of any kind, but particularly after sitting up all night. It was a glorious morning, the bright sun lighting up the gay colours of all the lovely flowers which adorned a very pretty garden, on which my room looked out. This garden was separated from the road and foot-path by iron palisades, in the centre of which was a gate, from which a long walk ran through the garden to the hall door.

I was in the act of putting on my dress when my attention was attracted by a lady, rather tall and slight, who entered the gate, though I know not how, for I did not see her open it, and yet she passed through it and walked up the path with her head bowed. Though the figure and dress were quite familiar to me—for I did not see the face—I *could not* recall who it was. I particularly noticed the dress, as having seen it before, but it did not help me to recognise the wearer.

Waiting in momentary expectation of hearing a knock at the front door, and failing to do so, I leaned out of the window and looked below. But not a living soul was there; the lady had vanished. Yet it was quite impossible for her to have left the garden without my seeing her. Then, and not till then, did I recognise in the lady my beloved mother—and the dress also as the last she ever wore.

My brother died the next day. Shortly before his death there was a knock at the front door, which was heard by him; he spoke of it, and enquired who it was. Everyone else in the house heard the knock, but upon the door being opened nobody was to be seen.

That some of us do possess the power to see supernatural appearances and to hear supernatural sounds cannot be denied. It is a mystery, as all that is connected with the world of spirits is a mystery, possibly never to be solved in all time. But what we know not now we shall know hereafter.

S. M. L.

CHRISTOBEL.

By Joyce Darrell, Author of "The Sapphire Cross."

I.

THE inhabitants of Fernholme were much excited on hearing that the beautiful Christobel Fane was coming on a visit to Mr. Hillyer's family at the Hall. At the beginning of the London season she had suddenly appeared under the wing of Mr. Hillyer's eccentric and wealthy maiden sister, Miss Millicent, who was always doing odd things. And one of the oddest, or at any rate most unexpected, things she had ever done was to adopt Miss Fane.

She had never been fond of young people, and was the last person in the world whom one would have suspected of self-sacrifice. She detested "society"—so called: that is, a round of balls and parties, of afternoon teas and tennis-matches; and for years had never shown her grim but handsome face in one of them.

But with the advent of Miss Fane everything was changed. Miss Millicent industriously renewed old and half-forgotten relations; called upon people whom she had not seen for a quarter of a century; and finally gave a large and brilliant ball herself. At this Miss Fane's beauty made a sensation. After it, she was asked "everywhere." Some very exalted personages admired her, and this lucky circumstance sealed the lips of the invidious, and killed all awkward wondering as to her origin. The mystery surrounding her—and there undoubtedly was one—seemed only to make her more charming; especially as she was as highbred-looking and refined as she was lovely. She was absolutely silent always as to her birth and parentage; and her manner did not invite interrogation. Miss Millicent curtly explained to one or two irrepressible cross-examiners, that Christobel was the daughter of an old friend who had died abroad in poverty and solitude, consequent upon the bad behaviour of a worthless husband; and when the questioners did not seem satisfied, the old lady calmly ignored their discontent. Of course people smiled and whispered and conjectured a little, at first; but after a while their curiosity languished for want of nourishment. Miss Hillyer's strong will imposed itself on her acquaintance; and the various rumours were crystallised into a dozen romantic stories, to each one of which there was somebody willing to testify.

It so happened that Miss Millicent's own family were among the last to make Christobel's acquaintance. The ancestral home of the Hillyers was in Yorkshire, and Miss Millicent for years had never crossed its threshold. The death of Mrs. Hillyer, five years before this story begins, had furnished an ostensible reason for closing the

Hall to visitors, and keeping the young people out of society. For the first time since his bereavement, Mr. Hillyer had invited down some men to shoot, and some ladies to amuse them in the hours not devoted to sport. To his great surprise, and not largely to his pleasure, a letter had arrived, one morning, from Miss Millicent, proposing that she and her protégée should join the party. Mr. Hillyer could not refuse, of course; a wealthy maiden sister, even when avaricious — and Miss Millicent, towards everybody but Christobel, showed herself deeply avaricious—is not to be treated cavalierly. Nevertheless, the Squire felt that the visit was ill-timed.

And his eldest daughter—the gentle Geraldine—could also have wished that it might have been made later. She would not have admitted it for the world. She would hardly even confess it to her own inmost soul; yet she dreaded Christobel Fane's arrival. Might not the beauty win from her the thing she most valued on earth—the prize she dared not yet call her own—Godfrey Verschoyle's love? Godfrey had not yet frankly declared himself; so how could she be sure of his feelings? She was no born coquette, confident of her unfailing power to please; but a timid girl, unused to the ways of the world, and with a far too humble opinion of herself.

The consequence was that she felt very uneasy as she sat silent among her visitors, on the afternoon of the day when Miss Millicent was expected. A lively group of ladies, some young and pretty, all fashionable and well-dressed, were assembled in the library of the Hall; and their spirits had just gone up considerably on the advent of three or four gentlemen. A hopelessly wet afternoon had sent the shooters home early; and a few of these had gathered round the tea-table instead of betaking themselves to the smoking-room and billiards. Among these was Godfrey Verschoyle—a tall, handsome young man, with the frankest face possible. He looked as unlikely to be perfidious as anybody on this globe; and his eyes often rested lingeringly on the graceful golden head of Geraldine Hillyer. She sat on a low seat by the fire, her own eyes, for the most part, intently fixed on the flames. She was conscious of her lover's glance, yet too self-tortured to respond to it quite happily.

"They ought soon to be here now," said Mrs. Chisholm, who, being a quasi-youthful widow, freshly emerged from her weeds, and still very pretty, was also much preoccupied about Miss Fane's arrival. "I wonder if I shall be disappointed? It is really dreadful to live so much out of the world as I have done lately. One misses so many charming things! Captain Verschoyle, have you, like every one else, been enslaved by Miss Fane?"

"I have never seen her," said Godfrey. "Last season I was not in London."

"True. You were travelling round the world. By the way, were you not in the Rocky Mountains with Edward Meredyth?"

"For a time—yes."

"He has a great American millionaire staying with him. Did you not say so, Geraldine?"

"So Lady Meredyth told me. When I invited Ned and any one of his guests to dinner to-morrow, she said she thought Mr. Vandyken would be the one to accompany him."

"Vandyken?" repeated Verschoyle, quickly.

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"I have heard the name," answered Godfrey, and strolled to the window. "Here comes a carriage," he presently said. "These must be your guests, Miss Hillyer. Yes—I see Miss Millicent's parrot."

There was a general stir of expectation: and the yelping of a lap-dog and the screaming of a parrot being presently audible, Geraldine rose and went towards the door. Before she reached it, it was thrown open, and the two ladies entered.

Miss Millicent, although quite an old woman, was singularly handsome and stately, but forbidding-looking. She took her niece's gentle greeting coldly; barely offering her cheek to be kissed. Then Geraldine turned towards Miss Fane. Extending her hand with a timid grace, and raising her eyes to the stranger's face, she underwent a revulsion of feeling which took her completely by surprise. Incipient jealousy died within her, quenched by a sudden rush of sympathy, mixed in some inexplicable way with pity. Yet Christobel was even more beautiful than she had imagined; beautiful enough to be in very deed a dangerous rival.

But there was something so appealingly mournful in her glance; a suggestion of so much sorrow in her proud and lovely face, that Geraldine, forgetting herself entirely for a moment, stood transfixed with admiration and interest. Doubtless, it was her own delicacy of perception that made her feel all this, for Miss Fane's manner belied her glance, and so far from seeming to claim sympathy, might rather be said to repel it. She was polite, and no more, and responded to each greeting in succession with a well-bred calmness that bordered on hauteur.

All this time Godfrey was still standing with his back to the window, and had made no step in advance. At last Geraldine, looking towards him in some surprise, said shyly:

"You know my aunt, Captain Verschoyle. Miss Fane, will you allow me to introduce ——"

She stopped short, struck by the sudden change in Christobel's manner. The girl, turning visibly pale, drew back and looked at Godfrey with dilating eyes. It was but for an instant, yet in that space Geraldine had time to feel a number of conflicting emotions.

Jealousy first of all, sharp, brief, agonising,—surprise, a little resentment, but above all, finally overcoming the rest, a passionate, wondering interest. For instinctively she felt that Christobel's stricken look was the sign of some anguish too deep for words.

Geraldine turned quickly to see how Godfrey was looking; and

although he still had his back to the light, she perceived, or fancied so, some astonishment also in him. He said not a word, however, only bowed profoundly; and presently taking a seat apart from the others, fell to watching Miss Fane, furtively but intently. There was some effort at general conversation, but the results were not brilliant. Geraldine was studying Christobel's face; the rest of the ladies were studying her dress, and wondering why she looked so handsome in it. Miss Millicent was tired and cross. Most of the gentlemen had reached that ante-prandial stage when further existence without a cigar is unendurable; and Godfrey was absolutely silent.

It was a relief to Geraldine when the dressing-bell rang, and she could escape to her own room. In that grateful solitude, she took herself severely to task. Despising herself for jealousy, she tried hard to overcome the feeling, and to feel persuaded that all she had seen was the mere effect of fancy. But the effort was not very successful, and Geraldine, after an hour's anxious struggle, was only a little more miserable than before. When dressed, she descended to the drawing-room, opened the door, and—startled two people: Captain Verschoyle and Miss Fane, who were standing in close conversation in front of the fire. They separated hastily, and Godfrey came forward to meet his young hostess. Something in her face moved him to say, with an obvious attempt at carelessness: "I was just asking Miss Fane if she knew any of my acquaintances in the States."

"Why? Is Miss Fane an American?" asked Geraldine, quickly, for the colour rose faintly into Christobel's pale cheeks, as she coldly answered: "Only in part;" and Godfrey, tugging at his moustache, looked as if he devoutly wished his observation unspoken.

II.

The girlhood of Geraldine Hillyer had not been happy. She had early lost her mother, whom she devotedly loved, and, from the age of fourteen, had been practically mistress of the house. The task thus devolving upon her was by no means an easy one. Mr. Hillyer, for the sake of the property, which was entailed, had ardently desired a son. Only daughters had, however, been born to him; and his lot, thus soured, had been additionally embittered by losses of money. To have extricated himself from his consequent difficulties he would have needed to mortgage his estate; and this was impossible without the consent of the next heir, his youngest brother, Harold Hillyer. And Harold Hillyer was out of England; *where*, nobody knew, for he had not been heard of for years.

He had, when still very young, at the end of a wild, half mad career, in a moment of terrible temptation, committed an act of forgery, and had expiated his crime in the usual way. His term of punishment over, he had disappeared, asking no help from his

people and receiving none. The Hillyers, for generations a proud race, had never recovered from the blow. Misfortune had dogged them ever since, they said bitterly. Sorrow made them prouder and more resentful, but not more energetic. They did not seek for remedies from within, but from without; vaguely expecting strokes of good fortune, and being disappointed when these failed them.

Geraldine had grown up, feeling year after year more strongly the incongruity between the family means and the family pretensions; harassed constantly by the need of economy and the impossibility of achieving it; patiently attaining to results, only to see them destroyed by some caprice or some folly of her father's. She had persuaded him, as long as her own education was not completed, to see but little company; and had thus put an end to the lavish hospitality which had become a proverb in the county.

But while Geraldine economized at home, Mr. Hillyer squandered abroad; and his daughter came at last to realise how vain were all her sacrifices.

Upon this sad, pathetic youth of hers the possibility of Godfrey Verschoyle's love had fallen like a sunbeam. To her, the proud and serious and silent young girl, bearing the burdens and expiating the follies of others, it had never seemed possible that anybody should love her for herself alone.

Pretty and graceful as she was, she held her own grace and beauty in small account beside those of other girls; and she was very far indeed—sweet soul!—from guessing that for anyone endowed with true insight, she possessed one all-compelling charm in her simple, ever ready kindness.

Captain Verschoyle seemed just a young Englishman of a type common enough—manly, upright, goodly to look upon; and intelligent above the average, if gifted with no special genius. He was so far superior to his fellows, that he had seemed on his first acquaintance with her to recognise the mingled sweetness and hidden strength of Geraldine Hillyer's character. Hers was a nature which, starved of love hitherto, needed it in order to expand; and the reverent, subdued tenderness with which Godfrey treated her had seemed like the realisation of a joyful dream. A hundred times he had apparently been on the brink of declaring himself; but something — one or other of the numberless invisible currents which determine human action, sometimes to its marring—had intervened; and Geraldine, half unconscious of what she hoped, had been kept in an agitated uncertainty.

A few words must be expended on the reason of the present unusual gathering at the Hall. The party had been assembled to do honour to Mr. Sherlock, an uncle of Mr. Hillyer's, who had lately returned to his own country after years spent in Australia.

This old man (he was over eighty) had had the good luck to make a large fortune in the Colonies; but there his luck ceased.

Deprived by death of his wife and children, while still singularly hale and strong for his age, he found himself without a creature belonging to him, in the land of his adoption.

He had then bethought himself of his kin in the old world, and had astonished them by his sudden apparition. It had been said that Mr. Hillyer believed in strokes of luck ; and thus it can easily be imagined what an object of interest his uncle became to him. As his only near relative (excepting Miss Millicent and the absent Harold), and the head of the family, he had he conceived a peculiar claim upon him, and he entertained secret hopes of his exhausted coffers being ultimately replenished out of Mr. Sherlock's purse.

The old man had so far remained a somewhat inscrutable individual : very silent ; hardly dignified enough to be described as reserved, and yet distinctly secretive.

Whether his reticence came from depth of design, as Mr. Hillyer sometimes feared, or from mere lack of ideas, as Geraldine often suspected, it was impossible to guess. He occasionally looked critically at his eldest grand-niece, and seemed pleased at any small attention which she showed him. Geraldine, on her side, underwent a constant struggle in regard to him ; for while her tender heart was touched by his loneliness, she was often revolted by her father's imperfectly concealed expectations, and shrank from the idea of appearing to share them.

And now to our story.

The butler announced dinner ; but Mr. Sherlock had not yet appeared, and the whole party waited for him. Mrs. Chisholm was so hungry, and Major Fortescue, one of the latest arrivals among the guests, perhaps from the same cause, so dull, that the little widow's temper was seriously impaired. What exasperated her still more was the discovery that the amber of Miss Fane's gown was a better shade than her own, and she had an agonising suspicion that it might also be more becoming.

Under such disastrous circumstances what could a bewitching little widow of the feline species do but look about for somebody particularly sensitive to scratch ? Her eyes fell on Geraldine.

"Darling Geraldine ! are you ill ?" she exclaimed. "You are absolutely as white as a sheet."

This drew everybody's attention to the victim, who crimsoned to the roots of her hair.

"I am only tired," said the poor girl, hastily, tortured by the bare idea that Godfrey and Miss Fane might guess the real cause of her pallor. On meeting Christobel's glance, her feelings did not improve, and she turned her head away with a movement, for her, almost pettish. Mrs. Chisholm, instinctively conscious of success, although the reason of it was unknown to her, pursued her advantage.

"I am positive," she said, plaintively, "that you fatigue yourself

too much. You are so anxious for our amusement that you never give yourself any rest."

"I do not think I exert myself especially," answered Geraldine, with a faint smile. "You are generally all kind enough to amuse yourselves."

"You do too much, far too much," persisted Mrs. Chisholm, smothering a yawn behind her fan. "Three days ago you had a dance; to-morrow you have a dinner party.——By the bye, who is coming from Sir Edward's?"

She asked this question briskly, remembering one of the baronet's guests, who might act as a fillip to Major Fortescue's languid "intentions."

"Only Sir Edward and Mr. Vandyken, the American millionaire."

Miss Millicent's fan falling at this moment to the floor, she stooped to pick it up, but as she did so it became entangled in the trimming of her dress, and she could not release it. Christobel rose and crossed the room to help her.

"Take care!" cried Miss Millicent, in a low voice, and laid her hand on the young girl's shoulder. The lace was very costly; probably she did not wish it torn. But Miss Fane was so long over the task, that at last Geraldine came in her turn to the rescue. As she bent down to give her services, she was surprised to observe that the cause of Christobel's failure were her trembling and icy-cold fingers.

"Are you ill?" she asked, kindly, struck next with the girl's death-like appearance.

"Ill! Nonsense! she is never ill," interrupted Miss Millicent, but her glance had an anxious expression which did not accord with her words. At the same moment she herself released the fan by a movement so abrupt that the lace was torn. Mrs. Chisholm cast Miss Fane a scrutinising glance, but before her penetration had time to work, a diversion was effected by the entrance of Mr. Sherlock. He came in noiselessly, a small, fresh-faced, wizened old gentleman, dressed with a faultless, old-fashioned care.

"It is half a century since we met," he said, going straight up to Miss Millicent. They were uncle and niece, but there was not above a dozen years' difference in their ages, Miss Millicent being the eldest of her family. She received him with a graciousness extraordinary for her, and had barely responded to his greeting before she drew Christobel forward with a marked alacrity, saying: "This is the person I love best in the world. You will be kind to her, I hope."

It was a strange speech to make, especially before her own kindred, and a room full of strangers as well, and Mr. Hillyer felt deeply offended and incensed. But the effect produced on Mr. Sherlock, either by Miss Millicent's words or by Miss Fane's own beauty, was apparently very favourable. He fixed his small, dull eyes on the girl's lovely face; talked to her in his dry, jerky way; and finally, when the

moment came for moving, offered her his arm and marched her into the dining-room. As the evening went on, it appeared that the old Australian was not the only person on whom Miss Fane had cast a spell.

Major Fortescue, who for days past had languidly allowed himself to be appropriated by Mrs. Chisholm, now deserted her for the newcomer. The lady thus abandoned hid her feelings successfully, but inwardly fumed; and jealousy sharpening her natural malice, she fell to watching her rival with a preternatural acuteness. Nothing that Christobel said or did escaped her, and it was she who subtly drew everybody's attention to the fact that Captain Verschoyle, when urging Miss Fane to sing, appeared to betray some previous knowledge of her capacity.

"Miss Fane looks as though she sang," said Godfrey, coolly enough, although he bit his lips. "And as one of my burning desires is to hear 'In Una Tomba' whenever I have the chance, it is natural that I should suggest it now."

"Qui s'excuse, s'accuse," murmured the widow behind her fan, but loud enough for Geraldine to hear.

Christobel rose and went to the piano. "As I do know 'In Una Tomba,' I will sing it," she said, "if only to encourage Captain Verschoyle in always asking for it, until he hears it sung to his taste."

She had a lovely voice, as full of feeling as her face; and she sang the noble, solemn song quite simply, yet with an intensity of longing which astonished her audience. When she ended, there ensued one of those silences which are more eloquent a thousandfold than applause.

"You sing like an artist," said Mrs. Chisholm, at last. "I remember once hearing of an American girl who sang that at a concert in Chester, and enraptured everybody. I was unwell, and could not go. I was *so* sorry; for all the gentlemen were raving when they came home. What *was* the name? Mildmay? Musgrave? *Mortimer*—That was it. Did you ever hear her, Miss Fane?"

"Yes," answered Christobel, quietly.

"At that very concert, perhaps?" Mrs. Chisholm put up her eyeglasses. Her tone was impressive.

"Yes, at that concert."

"Come and sing a duet, Mrs. Chisholm," suddenly interposed Godfrey, rising and approaching the piano. "You cannot have forgotten how you ravished us last night."

But Mrs. Chisholm protested. "She had a cold—she was hoarse. She could not sing after Miss Fane. Besides, she really wanted to hear more about Miss Mortimer. Perhaps Miss Fane knew her?"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Verschoyle, gaily. "How should Miss Fane know one concert-singer more than another? It is unkind of you to hesitate about the duet when you know I am expiring to show off!" And he drowned further expostulation in a shower of chords.

Two hours later, in Miss Millicent's bed-room, Christobel Fane was kneeling in front of her benefactress; her head bent upon her hands, her frame shaken with sobs. "It is too much; I cannot continue. I have not the strength," she wailed.

"Ungrateful girl! I will never forgive you if you break your promise now," the old woman answered, and her face was sombre, her tones were harsh. "Who rescued you from a life you hated? Who clothed and fed you when you might have starved? And what did I ask of you in return? Nothing, except to be silent."

"It is the deception I shrink from," said the girl, raising her beautiful eyes imploringly.

"I have no patience with such scruples. You think of nobody but yourself. You care nothing for him." Christobel's sobs grew louder, and Miss Millicent resumed, after an angry pause: "Deception, forsooth! And what better treatment do they deserve, these creatures who care more for the world's opinion than for their own flesh and blood?"

"Let us go from here," entreated Christobel, and put her arms supplicatingly round the rigid old form. "He does not need us now; he is happy enough. If ever sorrow overtakes him again, we can comfort him—we who love him. But why sacrifice truth and sincerity and self-respect for the sake of a paltry ambition?"

"Paltry!" echoed Miss Millicent, her eyes flaming with excitement. "Child! you don't know what you say. You are young; you are lovely; the world is all before. You have never been really unhappy."

Christobel's head sank lower, and she moaned.

"Ah! you think you have known sorrow, perhaps, for young hearts are impatient. But you have not sat, like me, for years by a lonely hearth; with nothing to look forward to but darkness, nothing to remember but one great shame. I have longed for the sight of his face, as only those *can* long whose lot has been loveless and embittered."

She stopped abruptly, for her voice broke, although her eyes were tearless. Her face, usually hard, had grown grey and anguished; and when Christobel, taking her hand, began to stroke it softly, she was seized with a violent trembling. Presently, she broke out again, passionately:

"I have hated the laughter, and wearied of the sorrow of others, just because of the void in my own aching heart. When you came at last after so long—so long—it seemed like the promise of a better time. Do you also intend to disappoint me?"

"I will stay with you always," cried Christobel.

"Yes, on your own terms," answered Miss Millicent, hardening again suddenly and repelling her embrace. "But that is not what I need, Christobel. You must reward me in my way, or not at all."

Christobel sighed and rose from her knees. "If I understood your plans better ——" she began.

"Never mind my plans. They concern me. All you have to do is to be passive. That odious widow, with her airs and her eye-glass —she sees better than anybody, I am sure—did she ever meet you before?"

"I don't think so."

"And Captain Verschoyle?" A faint blush rose to Christobel's cheek.

"He is safe," she said, reluctantly.

"Humph!" Miss Millicent looked at her closely, all agitation in her exchanged for scrutiny. "I hope you are not sentimental. That would spoil everything. And now go to bed, my dear."

Christobel stooped, and gently kissed the withered cheek. Miss Millicent took the caress stonily enough; but when alone she folded her hands with a sudden, apparently involuntarily gesture, and uttered half aloud a wish so fervent that it was like a prayer.

III.

Of the various guests at dinner next day at the Hall, by far the most interesting was the American millionaire, Mr. Vandyken. He was a remarkable looking man, distinguished, almost princely in appearance. His dark eyebrows and singularly brilliant black eyes, were in striking contrast to his snow-white beard and hair; his features were delicate, his figure slight and tall. He had a charming voice and pleasant, easy manners, with none of the prosiness and the twang of the typical Transatlantic nouveau riche.

In the quarter of an hour which elapsed between his arrival and the announcement of dinner he managed to make a good impression on everybody—with one exception.

That exception, as Geraldine saw or fancied, was Miss Fane.

Christobel and Miss Millicent had come in the last of all to dinner, the latter having been all the afternoon unwell. She had been seized with a sudden nervous trembling and an unaccountable excitement, very strange in one usually so self-possessed. The Squire, alarmed, had wished to send for a doctor; but to this his sister would not consent. She wanted no advice, she said; she knew how to manage herself; and Christobel alone was to wait on her. Even the gentle services of Geraldine were rejected, although the girl, always touched at the sight of suffering, had shown the full measure of her sweet, untiring sympathy.

When Miss Millicent appeared, at last, leaning on Christobel's arm, it was plain that, if better, she was by no means well. While her eyes were unnaturally bright, her hands were shaking, and she was deadly pale.

At the moment of gaining her chair, she stumbled and almost fell, so that several people precipitated themselves to help her, and even Mr. Vandyken made a courtly movement forwards.

It was when the little disturbance consequent on all this had subsided that Mr. Hillyer introduced the American to his sister and to Christobel.

Miss Millicent was probably still too shaken to behave in quite a normal manner. Be that as it may, she did not bow—only fixed her glittering glance, grown all at once so intense, on the stranger. Christobel bent her head slightly, almost haughtily, as it seemed to Geraldine, who, fascinated by everything she did, wondered vaguely at the cause.

During dinner Mr. Vandyken talked delightfully, telling curious anecdotes of men and things, and relating adventures in the far wild west, till everybody hung upon his words, and Miss Millicent above all listened with a breathless attention. He had the art, so rare—in a raconteur of Anglo-Saxon origin, at any rate—of knowing when to cease relating; and as the evening went on he turned his attention to England, and especially the neighbourhood where he was at present; asking intelligent, well-bred questions about everything.

"This is one of the fine old houses which delight us Americans," he observed presently, glancing round the beautiful old-fashioned room. "We read of such houses, and dream of them until all our luxury seems vulgar in comparison. I noticed that your library was oak-panelled. You have a picture gallery, of course?"

"Not a large collection, but we can boast some good family portraits," said Mr. Hillyer. "We have been painted indeed in every generation, but not always by famous hands. Would you like to see the pictures?"

"No!" abruptly cried Miss Millicent, to everybody's astonishment, and she looked inexplicably troubled. "There is nothing to see," she added, turning almost entreatingly, as it seemed, to Mr. Vandyken. "The pictures are worthless."

"Worthless!" echoed Mr. Hillyer, indignantly. "What are you thinking of, Millicent? There are portraits by Lely, and Kneller, and Reynolds. Worthless indeed!" The Squire was irritated at the bare idea, and took no pains to conceal his annoyance.

"I should most certainly like to see these portraits," said Mr. Vandyken in his smooth, pleasant way; and everybody being curious now about the pictures, the whole party moved off to the gallery.

They passed in review all the dead and gone Hillyers. Ladies in ruffs and stiff brocades, and ladies in white satin; knights in armour, and cavaliers in buff jerkins and plumed hats; damsels in sacques with powdered locks, and haughty-looking gentlemen in sky-blue coats leaning on diamond-hilted swords: a goodly array, with some famous personages among them, but mostly mere commonplace. The millionaire listened with flattering attention to all the family histories, and paused some minutes even before the totally uninteresting presentment of the master of the house.

"There is not much in that portrait," said Mr. Hillyer, with the

slight, conscious smile of a man who all his life has secretly thought a great deal of himself.

"And this?" The American had glanced enquiringly towards an empty frame. It was a curiously tactless question, especially for him!

Mr. Hillyer's brow darkened, and his voice had a bitter ring as he answered: "The picture that hung there has been removed."

There ensued a very awkward stillness, for everybody knew, or felt, that the portrait in question could be none but Harold Hillyer's. The silence was broken in the most startling manner by Miss Millicent.

"You might have let it stay," she cried, vehemently, with such a tone of passion as electrified her hearers. Mr. Hillyer gave her a violent glance, but the habit of society and an Englishman's horror of a scene restrained him.

"You are ill, I think," he said, coldly. "We had better return to the drawing-room; and you, Millicent, should go to bed. I am sure you are ill."

At this hint Christobel—herself very pale and with set lips—came forward and touched her protectress gently on the arm. But Miss Millicent, trembling all over, with quivering lips and outstretched hands, turned again to Mr. Vandyken.

"I have never forgotten him," she said, wildly. "I have prayed night and day for his return. I have banished from my life and from my thoughts every creature whom I knew, or fancied, still condemned him. From the hour that he left until yesterday my foot never crossed the threshold of this house, where his unnatural kindred dwell. For his sake I have led a lonely, well-nigh a hated life. I would have neither brother nor sister near me, neither husband nor child, for fear that with others to love me, my love for him might grow less. I ——"

She broke off with a long shuddering wail, and wringing her beautiful old hands together, lifted them above her head with an action so tragic that it absolutely thrilled them all.

There was something so unearthly in her anguish—something so heartrending in her agonised face, with its pathetic framing of grey hair, that her amazed hearers would hardly have had the force, even had they possessed the will, to interrupt her; but her brother, rousing himself at last, with an evident effort, cried angrily: "She is mad! Geraldine—Miss Fane, don't stand there like statues! Take her to her room, I tell you. Is such a scene to be borne?"

"I am not mad," said Miss Millicent. "Madness, like death, like every solace, has been denied me."

Her voice broke and she fell into a kind of hysterical sobbing, quite dry-eyed, however, and intolerably painful to listen to—it was so violent, and she looked so old! For a few moments silence again reigned; during which interval Geraldine, vibrating in every nerve with pity, drew near to her aunt, but did not dare to touch her. Mr. Vandyken, to whom Miss Millicent had so strangely addressed herself,

stood with compressed mouth and downcast eyes, his whole attitude expressive of well-bred embarrassment, mixed with a little not unnatural surprise.

"Millicent, come to your room," again spoke Mr. Hillyer, and laid his hand upon his sister's arm. She shrank from the touch, instantaneously, passionately; then, as if exhausted by that final effort, fell backwards in a faint.

The doctor, who was summoned in haste, pronounced Miss Millicent to be suffering from pressure on the brain. Her condition being somewhat critical, most of the guests went away; but at Mr. Hillyer's special request Mrs. Chisholm, Major Fortescue and Verschoyle remained.

Some shooting parties and consequent luncheons, which Sir Edward Meredyth got up to amuse the American, provided all three with occupation. For while the gentlemen blazed away at the partridges, Mrs. Chisholm, whenever it was possible, devoted her attention to a nobler quarry. This was nobody but the millionaire himself; *vice* Major Fortescue, who had eyes and ears for nobody but Miss Fane. Mrs. Chisholm resented his defection of course; but the keenness of her disappointment was greatly mitigated by the fact of the Major's elder and hitherto bachelor brother having suddenly taken to himself a wife. Under these circumstances she derived great satisfaction from the thought that on the one hand she had lost a prize of possibly insignificant value, and on the other she might, by cleverly pursuing her flirtation with Mr. Vandyken, achieve a magnificent revenge. He apparently lent himself very willingly to her views, and the autumn woods were peopled for her with visions of future grandeur in Fifth Avenue and Saratoga Springs.

Geraldine was also happier, for Godfrey had returned to his allegiance, if, indeed, he could ever have been said to have deserted it.

His manner had quite restored her easily won confidence; and if she still wondered a little at times whether her suspicions in regard to Miss Fane had been just, she was too generous and too delicate to ask questions.

Christobel was absorbed in her attendance on Miss Millicent, and excepting at dinner and for an hour or two afterwards, those out of the sick-room saw but little of her.

When she did appear, the person, after Fortescue, who paid her the most attention (although in an odd way) was Mr. Sherlock.

His interest in her was indeed so marked as to arouse very uneasy feelings in the mind of Mr. Hillyer, who was all the more disposed to entertain them that for his own part he had made but little way in the old Australian's favour.

Mr. Sherlock remained just the same as in the first hour of his appearance on the scene. Quiet, shrivelled, punctilious, with a keen eye to his own comforts and an apparent callousness to everything else,

his admiration, if such it were, for Christobel only betrayed itself by a watchful observance of her that amused her whenever she noticed it, and intensely irritated her host. He grew to detest his sister's beautiful protégée; to think badly of her, to wish her more fervently than ever out of the house.

Among all these conflicting sentiments, secret or avowed, the one person about whom there reigned a perfect unanimity of liking was Mr. Vandyken. He continued to capture all hearts and to keep them when captured. In his frequent visits to the Hall he treated everybody in the most charming manner—not excepting even Mr. Sherlock. In fact he professed for the latter a frank admiration which most people attributed to Mr. Vandyken's natural amiability, and to which the object of it was slow to respond. But quite unruffled by this coldness, Mr. Vandyken never lost an opportunity of claiming the old gentleman's "Transatlantic sympathy" for his views and schemes, which were many, and he would often laughingly prophesy that Mr. Sherlock would be his partner in his next large financial undertaking.

One day Mrs. Chisholm, putting her head into the library a little before the hour for afternoon tea, found Geraldine sitting alone in the firelight.

"My love!" she exclaimed, tripping forward blithely, "you don't go out enough; you really don't. Now I have just returned from a most delightful ramble on the moors. I have even been as far as that rise from which one looks down upon the quarry."

"Alone?" asked Geraldine, with a slight smile. It was difficult to believe that the widow could find a solitary ramble so pleasant.

"Quite alone—the gentlemen are out———hum———is everybody out?"

"Everybody, even Miss Fane. My aunt is much better—you have heard that both yesterday and to-day she walked about the room with the help of a stick? That being so, I persuaded her to send the poor girl out for a little fresh air."

"Hum—the poor girl—you persuaded———My dear Geraldine, I always think you are so sweet—so kind-hearted—so *unsuspicious*."

"Unsuspicious?" echoed Geraldine. But Mrs. Chisholm had taken up a magazine, and was carelessly turning over its pages. "Has anybody called?" she carelessly enquired.

"Only Mr. Vandyken," replied her young hostess, not without a spice of malice.

"Mr. Vandyken! How did he come? Did he stay long?" Mrs. Chisholm asked the questions in a tone of sharp curiosity, very different from her habitual pretty languor.

"No indeed—only five minutes. He just came with his usual kindness to enquire after my aunt, and he even asked at first only for Miss Fane, so as not to disturb me, he said."

A look of contempt, almost of aversion, contracted the pupils of

Mrs. Chisholm's eyes, as she looked for a moment steadily at Geraldine.

"Very kind!" she commented; then, as if impatient of further conversation, rose and moved towards the door. It opened before she reached it, to admit Christobel. As she advanced, her extreme pallor struck even Geraldine, while Mrs. Chisholm icily observed: "The air of the moors does not seem to have done you much good, Miss Fane. I fear you must have fatigued yourself by walking as far as the quarry."

Then, as her victim sank into a seat without making any reply, she swept away with no more substantial satisfaction from her Parthian shot than the pleasure of having delivered it.

"You do indeed look very tired," observed Geraldine, kindly taking Christobel's listless hand in hers. "I fear your attendance on my aunt has quite worn you out."

A little quiver ran through Christobel's frame. Drawing Geraldine's hands up to her face, she laid her cheek upon them with a gesture at once childlike and passionate, murmuring in a low tone of exceeding mournfulness: "I am worn out, indeed; but not with watching."

The words, the action, so simple yet pathetic, touched Geraldine to the heart. "You are not happy, I fear. Can I—can nobody be of help to you?" she asked gently and hesitatingly, fearing even while she longed to lift the veil of mystery which shrouded this alluring, inscrutable girl.

"You are right," said Christobel. "I am not happy; but I should be silent as to my sorrow, for I cannot explain its cause; and I have no need, God knows, to heighten by any appearance of concealment the blame which must inevitably attend my present life."

"The blame!" repeated Geraldine in wonder.

"Do not even you—sweet and good as you are!—blame me for submitting to be maintained by your aunt?"

Geraldine hesitated for one moment, but the next, meeting Christobel's proud yet appealing eyes, she answered readily: "My aunt loves you; she is lonely and old. Why should she not keep you with her?"

"You have a divine heart," exclaimed Christobel, with a solemn fervour of conviction which robbed her words of all exaggeration; "and I feel the full kindness of your generous words all the more that, from the moment of my mother's death until I came to live with your aunt, my life was very lonely and loveless."

"But surely you did not live alone?"

"Yes. If to be alone means to be cut off from all companionship that does not harden and degrade."

"I can hardly believe you. You must have been hedged about with devotion." Poor Geraldine as she spoke felt a passing pang of pardonable envy—a momentary revival of doubt and pain.

"You are thinking of lovers," answered Christobel, with a fugitive, rather bitter smile. "But the garish light of experience shows the seamy side of *that*, as well as of every other romantic dream. What one longs for in sorrow is to be comforted by someone—a mother—a sister—who asks for no recognition or reward, who is drawn to one not by beauty or charms, but clings through good and evil report simply because of the tie of blood and kinship. You, who have dwelt here, always secluded and holy, like St. Barbara in the tower, can hardly conceive what it is to be deprived of all this."

"You think it? Ah, how little you know!" exclaimed Geraldine, while a sudden sense of her own joyless youth rushed over her and filled her eyes with tears.

Christobel was startled. This girl, then, on whose lot she had looked with envy, who had a home and an assured position, with kindred and friends about her, was hardly more happy than herself.

"How selfish I have been! I never guessed," she murmured in answer to her own unspoken thought. And then, as Geraldine, half ashamed, because of her natural sweet reticence, to have said so much, struggled to be calm, her guest leant forward and softly kissed her on the brow.

"A very pretty picture, I declare," remarked the dulcet tones of Mrs. Chisholm, who, unnoticed, had appeared at the curtained arch dividing the library from the drawing-room. Behind her were Major Fortescue and Godfrey.

"Major Fortescue, you have a portfolio under your arm, and I have just discovered that you sketch," continued the widow. "Here is a subject for you. You might call it 'Hermia and Helena;' shall we say after the quarrel, or before it?" and Mrs. Chisholm laughed.

"Have you then brought your sketches to show me, according to your promise?" asked Christobel softly of the Major as he sat down beside her.

Fortescue's evident admiration and quiet but watchful devotion had touched her very much; the more so that she had gradually discovered in him qualities which most people, judging superficially, were wont to overlook. Under his languid manners and indolent talk she had detected both character and intelligence. Now, as he began to show her the contents of his portfolio, she was surprised at the extent of talent revealed by them.

"This is not amateur's work. Where have you studied?" she said.

"In France, Italy, but always in rather a dilettante fashion. I am afraid it has not been my habit to put much earnestness into anything—until now."—He added the last words in a lower tone, and with an earnest, almost supplicating look that did not need much comment. A troubled expression crossed Christobel's face, as she turned away her head with a sad little gesture of negation in answer to his unspoken request.

"You know what I mean," Fortescue resumed.

"Please don't say any more," interrupted the girl, distressed. "If you could guess how far such ideas are from me—how they jar with all my aims, with my whole life!"

He looked perplexed as well as pained, for her manner was unmistakably sincere, and her words amounted to a rejection; but at the same time, in her voice and look there was something sorrowful and appealing, almost like a prayer for indulgence, which he could not understand.

Further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the post. It brought one or two letters for everybody except Christobel, who, as Mrs. Chisholm immediately remarked, "never received any," and a telegram as well for Major Fortescue.

The little widow, having glanced through her own correspondence, and being presently at a loss for further occupation, bethought herself of the portfolio and asked Christobel to show it to her.

"Major Fortescue is quite an artist," she exclaimed, as she turned over the sketches. "Who would ever have thought it?"

"Not I, for one," said Verschoyle, laughing. "Not, indeed, that I doubted Fortescue's ability," he added, "but because of his air of graceful leisure, which one takes to be incompatible with work of any kind."

A curious expression flitted over Fortescue's face. He had been standing by the fire in a very thoughtful and silent mood ever since the receipt of the telegram, but now roused himself to say: "I have had some news which obliges me to return to town, Miss Hillyer. I am afraid I must leave you, even before dinner."

Many regrets were expressed, of course, and Verschoyle tried a little persuasion to induce his friend to remain, but Fortescue was firm. The news which he had received was important, evidently, for he looked sombre but resolute, like a man who is facing a crisis. Only when bidding Christobel good-bye did he betray any emotion, and then it was visible to no one but her. Her eyes fell beneath the grave tenderness of his glance, and she let her fingers dwell perhaps a moment longer than was needful in his strong, detaining clasp.

But except that the colour flushed a little into her cheeks she gave no sign of feeling, and Fortescue dropped her hand suddenly at last; so suddenly, indeed, that it was like an act of renunciation. Christobel remembered it later, and was sorry.

That evening, after dinner, whether from the state of the atmosphere or some other cause, everybody was singularly depressed. Christobel was silent, Mrs. Chisholm bored, Mr. Hillyer morose, and Mr. Sherlock sleepy. Godfrey and Geraldine, indeed, looked very happy, but as they sat apart and communicated the secret of their joy to no one, they did not enliven the rest of the party.

Into the midst of all this, the sound of the door-bell loudly rung fell with a welcome promise of excitement. But the next feeling to

assert itself was alarm, for the door was flung open to admit Sir Edward Meredyth, who advanced hurriedly, looking pale and scared. He was a nervous, excitable man by nature, and was too thoroughly overwrought at this moment to keep back his bad news.

"Vandyken," he gasped. "At what hour did he come here to-day? Whom did he see?"

"He saw me," exclaimed Geraldine. "He stayed only a few moments, and then left to take a long walk, as he said, on the moors."

"And he went as far as the Quarry, and there he met Miss Fane," promptly interposed Mrs. Chisholm.

At this, everybody turned and looked at Christobel, who was sitting like a statue, with a frozen look of horror, and of something deeper also than mere horror, in her bloodless face. She neither stirred nor spoke in answer to Mrs. Chisholm's remark, and Sir Edward, so excited as to be unable to dwell long on any aspect of the question, went on hurriedly: "The most extraordinary circumstance is that if there has been foul play, its object was not clearly robbery, for my poor friend's watch and rings are all untouched, although his purse is missing. Even the diamond pin in his necktie is still there."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Hillyer. "Do you mean then to say that Vandyken is—is hurt?"

"Hurt? He is dead!" replied Sir Edward, every moment more distraught. "I tell you he was found at the bottom of the old Quarry, lying on his face, and so disfigured by the fall as to be unrecognisable but for his clothes and his beard."

"Oh, hush!" cried Mr. Hillyer, as Geraldine and Mrs. Chisholm screamed aloud. "You never told me until this moment," he added, angrily. "How could I guess at anything so horrible?"

Sir Edward was now striding up and down the room, wiping his brow repeatedly with his handkerchief, and talking half to himself, half to others, but still too excited to consider anything but his own feelings.

"To think of such an end to his visit," he exclaimed. "Such an appalling death. Poor fellow! Poor Vandyken! I——"

"Oh, cease," cried Christobel, suddenly springing to her feet, and pointing wildly towards the door. But even as she spoke her cry was drowned in a shriek of horror, and everybody turning, saw what she had already seen: Miss Millicent standing in the open doorway, her face ashen-pale and haggard with woe, one shaking hand outstretched, the other convulsively clutching the stick on which her enfeebled frame leaned for support.

"What has happened? Who is dead?" She asked the question in a strained, unnatural voice, and fixed dilating eyes of anguish on Sir Edward.

"Nobody of the family, Miss Hillyer," he began, soothingly.

She interrupted him. "Speak!" she said, hoarsely.

The baronet felt desperate. After all, the shock could not be great to her, he reflected; and it was a relief to him to share the horror of his news with anybody.

"A sad accident has happened to my friend, Vandyken. *He* is dead," he answered, bluntly.

Miss Millicent turned half round, as people do when shot through the heart. She threw her arms suddenly apart; then, without a cry, fell senseless into Christobel's embrace.

After this all was confusion. Miss Millicent's maid came rushing down in pursuit of her mistress, whom she had just missed. She explained that Miss Millicent had been strangely restless all the evening, and on hearing Sir Edward's peal at the door had sprung up, saying wildly that there was bad news—she knew it, felt it—and she ordered her maid to go down and enquire. Apparently, the woman had been too slow in returning for the impatience that consumed her mistress, and by an effort which, in her actual condition, was little short of miraculous, Miss Millicent crept downstairs.

This and the shock of hearing of Mr. Vandyken's tragical end had presumably been too much for her, for she never rallied from this second attack. Her mind had been probably going for sometime, the doctors said, and this explained the extraordinary part she had played on the occasion of the American's first visit to the Hall. At any rate, if there were any other explanation, nobody learnt it, for Miss Millicent never spoke again. She remained in a state of coma for thirty-six hours, and then, just as the dawn of the second day broke, she died. Christobel tended her with untiring devotion, and was so absorbed in her self-imposed task as to overlook, entirely at first, the strange, unspoken hostility with which everybody, Godfrey alone excepted, regarded her.

Even Geraldine, although always gentle and even kind, was distinctly colder than before. The truth was, she could not entirely shake off the impression which she had received from a conversation with Mrs. Chisholm on the night when Sir Edward had brought his dreadful news. Worn out with fatigue and excitement, she was preparing, very late, for bed, when a knock came at the door. She opened it to admit Mrs. Chisholm, who advanced with an air of portentous mystery which, as her young hostess felt even in that moment, sat strangely on her pretty little face.

"Did you notice?" asked the widow, without preliminary.

"Notice what?"

"Miss Fane's extraordinary conduct."

"Extraordinary? I thought her singularly calm and self-possessed," replied Geraldine, wearily, being in no mood for gossip.

Mrs. Chisholm shook her head. "Mark my words, Geraldine; that girl knows more than you think. She was with Mr. Vandyken at the Quarry this afternoon. When Sir Edward came in this even-

ing I happened to glance at her. She looked terrified before *we* had time to realise that there was any real cause for alarm; and then again when Sir Edward mentioned that his poor friend had not been robbed, her expression changed suddenly to one of relief, which, if not altogether inexplicable, is to be explained only in one way——"

"And what is that?"

"I am loth to believe evil," said Mrs. Chisholm, suddenly angelic, "but I think—I *think* that expression meant that the presence of the watch and other objects conveyed to that artful creature's mind the probability of this shocking death being regarded generally as an *accident*."

"And was it not very natural that Miss Fane—that anybody should feel relief from such a supposition?" asked Geraldine, rather indignantly.

Mrs. Chisholm looked unutterable things. "I am willing to think all that is charitable," she replied. "But in some cases instinct is stronger than logic. I have always *felt* that Miss Fane (as she calls herself) is an adventuress. Why should she have met Mr. Vandyken, evidently by appointment, at the Quarry, unless she had designs on him? She had been in America—she had probably known him before. And, Geraldine, you are so unsuspicious, the notion had probably never entered your pure mind; but it is quite, *quite* clear that she has some secret understanding with Captain Verschoyle."

This shaft told. Geraldine had made one or two gestures of horrified protest during Mrs. Chisholm's last speech; but at the final phrase of all, she shrank and was silent.

Mrs. Chisholm having then achieved her object; having slandered, without giving full expression to her calumny; having planted a poisoned shaft and looked unconscious while doing it, folded her "sweet Geraldine" in her arms, and tripped off to rest with a heart unutterably lightened.

The whole of the next day she employed in hints and innuendoes, only sparing her remarks to Godfrey, who, she felt, might be unpleasantly indignant about them. And she had managed to weave a very subtle net of suspicion round the unconscious Christobel, when—unfortunately, after so much trouble—Sir Edward suddenly burst for a second time, like a bombshell on the Hall, and brought a fresh supply of news, which, while greatly increasing the mystery of recent occurrences, made them much more difficult, even for Mrs. Chisholm, to fathom.

(*To be concluded.*)

THE DEVIL IN DUNCHESTER.

A PROFESSIONAL EPISODE.

ONCE, many years ago, I happened to be much in want of a human head—and lest such a want on the part of a civilised being should appear shocking or even incredible, I hasten to add that it was for scientific purposes. But for whatever purposes required, it is not an article usually kept in stock in a country town, and I had almost determined on making a long journey to London in search of it, when I chanced to hear that a notorious murderer was to be executed on the following Saturday at Dunchester, a place at no great distance, and where I was not unknown.

Even at that time traffic in the bodies of criminals was illegal, but I was aware that in spite of the restrictions of the law it was often possible to procure a hand, a foot, or such other small "subject" as might be required—why not then a head? Determined at any rate to try my luck, I immediately invited myself to the house of a medical friend in Dunchester.

It was with some anxiety that I entered the gaol on that Saturday night; but to my relief I found that the criminal had been without friends or relations likely to take an interest in his remains, and the obstacles between me and my much-coveted "subject" were comparatively few and slight. Still it was not to be obtained in a moment, and it was past midnight when it was finally delivered to me, loosely wrapped in an insufficient sheet of newspaper.

"That's all as I could find sir," said the man apologetically, "but I suppose you've got a basket or a handkerchief."

"Basket!" I exclaimed impatiently, "of course not—and as to my handkerchief I have some other use for it. Give me the head and look sharp, there's a good fellow."

"Well, sir," returned he, handing me the parcel, "I can't say as it's very securely wrapped, and"—laboriously turning the big key of the postern gate, that opened into the outer air with a grim clanking of chains—"Jim he always was an uncommon slippery chap to hold, and if I didn't know he was as dead as a door nail, I could take my Davy that ugly mug of his was as lively as ever. Good night, sir."

And while he was still laughing uneasily at his own humour the gaol gate banged behind me, and I was alone in the chill darkness of a stormy winter's night.

Dunchester gaol stands in an exposed position on the top of a hill, half-way up which straggle a few dingy little streets, so steep that the roadway becomes at last merely a narrow flight of stone steps ascending between sordid houses. A wind from the North Sea was sweeping before it an endless succession of heavy clouds, from which there fe

at intervals a few cold drops of rain, and it was no easy matter to struggle across the bare hill-side, encumbered as I was with a cloak and the head, which certainly was exceedingly difficult to hold.

But at length the worst of the struggle seemed over. I had crossed the open ground and reached the top of a narrow alley, whose darkness was made visible by the flicker of a few gas lamps, and was congratulating myself on the shelter it afforded, when suddenly a blast, fiercer than any of its predecessors, swept round the corner of a detached house. It caught the heavy folds of my cloak, and wrapping them about me, whirled me round and round again, seized the hat from my head, and would have driven it eddying away into infinite darkness, had I not involuntarily put up both hands to save it. There was a quick rustle, followed by the flapping of a loose sheet of newspaper, and I realised with a shock that the head was gone.

Yes, there it was, painfully visible under those lamps whose obscurity I had a moment before mentally condemned; turning towards me alternately as it rolled and bounded from step to step of the narrow way, now the uncompromising blackness of its shaven scalp, now the livid gleam of its sinister countenance.

A little below me the alley took a sharp turn, and just at the corner a stream of light from an open door-way fell across the path. Even now in its wild career my twice ill-fated head was hurrying to the verge of this luminous streak, and in a moment more, as I sped with swift but cautious steps in pursuit, it appeared in bold relief against the wet pavement before the door. At the same instant the consolatory reflection flashed through my mind that, at the pace at which it was going, even if it were seen from within the house, it would hardly be recognised for the ghastly, improbable thing it was, and if it continued in its present course it must, according to the laws of mathematics, be shortly landed in the corner of a blind wall. But Jim, I might have remembered, had always preferred the circuitous and surprising to the direct course, nor did he habitually hamper his movements by any respect for any laws whatsoever. There was a diabolical *verve* about the way in which his head, availing itself of a slight unevenness in the slope, dashed against the scraper, rebounded at a sharp angle, and bumping down the two descending steps of the threshold, rolled into the lighted room and out of sight.

For a moment I stood transfixed; but to the first thrill of horror and amazement there succeeded an overmastering impulse to re-capture at all risks this thing, this creature of mine, which thus openly and at once outwitted and defied me.

Pulling my hat over my eyes I strode boldly to the door. There it lay, at the very feet of a solitary woman, who convulsively grasping the seat of her chair, leaned forward, staring at the ghastly intruder with a face as pale as its own—which was turned towards me with what seemed, to my excited imagination, a grin of impudent malice on its livid features. I leapt into the room with a yell of mingled rage

and triumph, pounced upon my prey, seized it by both ears, and bounded back into the lane before the poor woman had recovered the use of her lungs. In an instant more I was dashing wildly down, down I knew not whither, bounding from stone to stone with my voluminous cloak flying in the wind, and the shrieks of this last of Jim's many victims ringing ever more and more faintly in my ears.

Luckily for me, policemen in Dunchester, as in other provincial towns, were rare phenomena ; and ceasing to run as soon as all danger of immediate pursuit seemed over, I walked on for an uneasy mile or so, holding firmly on to the head, which I could not help fancying to be on the look out for another opportunity of doing me an ill turn.

However, I reached my room without further misadventure, and retired to bed to spend half an hour before I slept, in resolving not to imagine that any noises of any description emanated from the box into which I had thrown the head. By the morning, it is needless to say, I could laugh at my own folly, and pack up my prize with feelings of unalloyed satisfaction.

But my escapade was not thus to pass into inglorious oblivion.

Just as my host was starting to visit a serious case in the country, a boy arrived with a request that he would step round to see a woman in Bishop's Alley, who had taken to her bed in consequence of having seen—the devil. The luxury of horror and mystery in which the soul of the small messenger was evidently revelling as he made this last important announcement, caused my friend much amusement, but my own mirth had a hollow ring in it, for I seemed to recognise the name of the locality. As my friend could not foresee how long he would be detained in the country, I offered to attend this apparently slight case for him, and he gladly assented.

The boy led the way. Once more I was treading, but now with what sober professional feet, those uneven steps down which but a few hours since I had urged my desperate and disreputable career. I found my patient, a respectable, middle-aged widow, lying on her bed in a tearful condition, but with all the suppressed dignity of one who would not seem too much puffed up by the afflictions which had distinguished her.

"Eh, doctor," she said, groaning. "It's little enough you can do for me, I reckon."

"Ay, sir," put in a consolatory neighbour. "Them as sees dead folks as plain as Mrs. Wilkins do, ain't mostly long for this world."

"It ain't that that's on my mind," returned the widow. "I'm prepared, I am. It's the place as my old man's in, which I never should ha' thought it if I hadn't been found worthy to see. You wouldn't ha' said that Tom was particular sinful when he warn't on the spree, would you now, Mrs. Cox? But the Lord, He knows folks' hearts better nor we do."

Although I was bound to treat her story as the outcome of night-

mare or hysterical delusion, I was curious to hear it, and she was most willing to tell, though probably for the thousandth time.

"You see, sir, it was this way. I'd got Mr. Smith's shirts on hand, and heard it strike twelve as clear as clear, and I says to myself—'Lord forgive me—Maybe it's Sunday and maybe it aint, but I'm going to finish this here shirt.' Then the door flew open of itself, and I thought it was the wind, and I'd shut it when I'd done my buttonhole; and suddenly I went all of a tremble, and I looked up and saw something come hopping down the steps into the room—and Lord have mercy upon us, if it weren't my old man!—At least he hadn't no body, but there was his head as plain as could be, coming along all of itself, staring and grinning at me, with his hair all on end. He came straight up to me, as much as to say: 'Just hide me under your petticoats, Mary Ann, for there's someone I don't much fancy looking after me.' And sure enough, before I had time to say 'Tom,' there was the devil."

"But how did you know it was the devil?" I asked.

"Why, sir, I see him as plain as I see you. He dropped right down into the room out of nowhere, something like a man, but a deal bigger, and almost as black as a nigger, and with wings and a face for all the world like ''Pollyon' in the Pilgrim's Progress. He gave a kind of roar like a wild beast, and down he came on my poor Tom, and then he spread his wings as black as soot, and pretty near as big as mill-sails, and flew off and away with him in the twinkling of an eye. And, Lord bless and keep us all, I never shall get over it!"

"No, indeed, Mrs. Wilkins, I don't believe as you ever will be the woman you was, again," chimed in Mrs. Cox, rather by way of expressing her sympathy than of stating a fact.

I of course assured Mrs. Wilkins that the troubles through which she had passed had unhinged her nerves, and that the whole affair was the creation of a disordered fancy; an explanation which she and her friends received with profound scepticism, and which, for various reasons, I did not press upon them. Indeed, apart from motives of personal convenience, he would have been a hard man who, on that happy Sunday morning, could have found it in his heart to destroy the pleasing illusion of Bishop's Alley. Never on the brightest summer evening had there been such animated groups standing at the doors and sitting on the steps. The truth would have fallen as a blow on the whole population, from Mrs. Wilkins herself to the little match-boy lodging opposite, who had smelt the brimstone. For, however fallen in the estimation of doctors and dignitaries of the church, the devil is still dear to the popular imagination, and I doubt not that the legend of his brief but impressive appearance in Bishop's Alley, even now lends a gloomy dignity to the otherwise sordid shades of that unromantic neighbourhood.

A MODERN FATIMA.

IT had been no easy matter for Alick Rogers to win the love of Audrey Morrison.

There was, apparently, no reason why he should have had any difficulty over his courting. Audrey had never loved anyone else, and Rogers was a tall, well-made man of about thirty; sufficiently good-looking to pass in a crowd, sufficiently gentle mannered not to repel any woman, and sufficiently manly to attract one: he was not wealthy, but he had enough means to marry comfortably on, and he was a gentleman by birth and education. But there was a certain amount of reserve about him, there were a few oddities of manner and of temperament, which Audrey could not easily forget or forgive. She was the only child of the Squire of Middleburgh, and, as such, had been spoiled and petted from her childhood, so that even her sweet, sunny nature became more or less capricious and wayward: whilst her personal beauty taught the girl, as she grew up, that her power extended beyond the home circle, and that wherever she chose she could rule and be served.

However, she never cared for anyone except for Alick Rogers: and though she teased him and played with him in the barbarous manner of a cat with a mouse, she loved him all the time; and at last she let him know it. And on the first of May, not many Mays ago, they were married amid great rejoicings and festivities, and Rogers carried off his much-loved bride to his own home in the suburbs of London. She was then only twenty-one.

Audrey grumbled at the house a little, when she found that, although he had told her exactly what it was like, it resembled his description of it and not her own imagination. It was a "villa residence" of the larger kind, detached, and standing in a good-sized garden, with a lawn-tennis ground and conservatory. She grumbled, too, at its situation at the corner of three quiet roads, with nothing but similar villa houses for miles around. But in spite of her murmurings, Audrey was a very sprightly young woman, and she began life in the highest spirits, dearly loving her husband and implicitly trusting him. She was a girl of some depth of feeling, though apparently so careless, and when she gave herself to Alick she knew that her love for him was the keystone of her life.

Her husband, a solicitor, used to go up to town at 9.30 every morning. Audrey found the days rather long, for he never came home till nearly seven, and she had nothing to occupy her time with, except such amusements as she could make for herself and the visits of friends. These latter were numerous; for Rogers had lived for a long while at L——, and everybody was glad to know so attractive a woman as his young wife.

Even the old bachelor head of the firm Rogers was in, came all the way down from town to call on her one afternoon; and, finding her society very pleasant, and her cool drawing-room most comfortable, he actually stayed on till her husband's return. Only one or two remarks out of the long chat they had together need be chronicled, because Audrey remembered them. She was laughingly complaining to Mr. Ellerton of the long hours he gave her husband at the office.

"I do not so much mind his time for getting home," she said; "it is his early start I so dislike."

Mr. Ellerton looked amused. "Well," he said, "I don't know what you young people call *late* if Rogers is early."

"He leaves home punctually at half-past nine every morning."

"Really! So soon as that! Why he never gets to the office until eleven."

"It *is* a long journey for him," Audrey said, and changed the subject."

That evening, whilst chatting with her husband, Audrey asked him a question casually: "How long does it take you, Alick, to get from the house to the office?"

"How long? Oh, just an hour," he answered, hardly looking up from his paper.

There was clearly a discrepancy of half-an-hour somewhere. Probably old Mr. Ellerton was mistaken in the time at which Rogers arrived.

One day, after Rogers had gone up to town, Audrey, amusing herself in tidying up the things in his dressing-room, came across a prettily dressed new doll. She laughed a good deal to herself over this plaything, took it down to the drawing-room with her, and greeted him with his toy when he came home. He seemed vexed, and asked her where she had found it.

"It was in your drawer, Alick. Why should you mind my bringing it down?"

"Oh, it's so silly."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Give it away, of course."

And the next morning he started at the usual time with a parcel looking very much like the doll under his arm.

Feeling vexed that he had not told her more about it or asked her to do it up for him, she did not wave her usual good-bye to him as he went out of the drive; then, a moment afterwards, repenting her ill-temper, she ran down the garden that she might see him again and greet him from the arbour at its extremity. But by the time she reached that spot he had already passed, and was striding down the long road that led to the station. Audrey bent forward to look after him.

Just before he would have turned out of her sight, he stopped—opened the garden-gate of a small unpretending villa-dwelling near

the road, passed up the path to the house and entered it; without ringing the bell, as it seemed to Audrey, though she could not be quite sure at that distance. She coloured up instantly. It was very odd if Alick had friends in the tiny house so near, that he had not said so, or even mentioned their names to her: and she fell into thought.

Perhaps they were poorish people whom he was interested in and kind to, without wishing to bother her about it; but, if so, why—oh, why did he stay so long? It was just half an hour before Mr. Rogers came out of the house again, without the parcel, and continued his way towards the station.

Audrey instantly put on her things and went to inspect the villa. It was small but very well kept, and the bright face of a well-dressed child of about three years old—evidently not a poor child—was to be seen at one of the windows playing with the doll she herself had laughed so merrily over the day before. Where was the harm in her husband's making a present to any child he fancied? Audrey knew that it was ridiculous to be angry at that; though if she had been a wise woman she would have told Alick that evening that she had seen him go into the villa, which was called Rose Villa, and would have asked him the name of the child who lived there. But Audrey was not wise: she was excitable, impetuous, spoiled, and Alick was certainly difficult to deal with in some matters: so she said nothing at all about it, and though she was discontented at heart, she smiled more brightly than ever and sang to him the whole evening through with admirable good humour.

The next morning it was wet.

"You'll have to stay in all day, my darling, I am afraid!" Alick said, as he stooped to kiss her before he went away.

"Yes, I am afraid I shall!"

But directly he was gone, she slipped on an old ulster, and taking an umbrella from the hall, she ran across the garden again to the arbour, and again she saw her husband turn into Rose Villa. Audrey waited in the soaking rain whilst he stayed there, which was just half an hour. She slowly went back to the house, utterly oppressed by the missing half hour which Mr. Ellerton had disclosed to her, and feeling very anxious and unhappy. By and by she found she had caught a cold, standing out in the rain; but when her husband sympathetically asked her in the evening how she had managed it, she replied that she did not know. He noticed that there was something wrong with her, but put it down to the cold.

Every day in the following week, Audrey watched her husband into Rose Villa at 9.30, and out of it at 10 o'clock. She herself haunted it during the day time. The only people she ever saw coming out of it were the bright-eyed recipient of the doll and his nurse—for it was a little boy—but she naturally imagined they did not live there alone. And although she would not allow her suspicions to take any definite form, her husband's behaviour with regard to

these two was certainly very, very strange, and she fretted and grieved all the more sadly because any worry was so wholly foreign to her nature. Alick Rogers could not imagine what ailed her, and at last suggested that she should go away to her own home for change of air.

"I cannot possibly leave the office just now," he said; "but I would far rather be lonely here without you than see you so fagged and low spirited!"

But the more anxious her husband seemed for her to leave him, the more firmly Audrey declined to do so.

There came a day when, in passing, she saw the child playing alone in the small front garden. Audrey stopped and spoke to him.

"What a lot of playthings you have got there!" she said.

"Yes, uncle gives me lots and lots."

But his nurse came flying out at that moment and called him in, as if afraid of his being spoken to, and Audrey learned no more that day. She was just a tiny bit relieved by what she had heard, for she believed that her husband had never again taken any toys with him when he went there; and as the child had so many, someone else, she thought, must give them to him. But, again, the unlucky possibility occurred to her that Alick might leave the presents on his way back from town. Accordingly she stationed herself in the arbour to watch his arrival; and sure enough that evening he went into the villa with a large brown paper parcel and came out of it empty-handed! She took then to watching regularly morning and evening; but he did not often stop there on the return journey.

The next time she saw the child playing about she asked him his name.

"Alick," he answered, promptly.

A horrible shudder ran through poor Audrey.

"But Alick what?" she asked.

"Alick What—no, Alick," he said, ignoring like most children everything except the name by which he was daily called.

"Little Alick, where is your mamma? I never see her."

"There!" he said, pointing to the nurse, who was coming up now to the child's side.

Audrey would not be scared away. "What a nice little fellow it is!" she said, pleasantly. "I was asking him where his mamma is. I never see her about."

"Poor little boy! I don't know where she is," replied the nurse. "I don't know anything about her."

"Then—is he left entirely in your charge?—by his father?"

"He is entirely in my charge. But whether it is his father who leaves him with me, or his uncle, as the child has been taught to call him, I don't know. Of course I have my thoughts."

"A gentleman comes to see him every day, does he not?"

"Yes; that's the uncle," replied the nurse. "He is mighty kind

to the child, and fond of him, and he pays me well for taking care of him, and that's all I know about the matter and all that concerns me."

"Uncle Alick brings me candy, and toys, and pictures," said the child.

"What a good uncle!" exclaimed Audrey. "I should like to see him. Have you a picture of him? Will you show it to me?"

She was feeling desperate. But she wanted to be quite, *quite* sure; and some little delusive whisper at her heart was suggesting that possibly, after all, it might not be her Alick.

"Have you a likeness of the uncle?" she repeated, turning to the nurse. "If so, I should like to see it."

She asked this quite desperately; it was probable that her request would reach her husband's ears; but she did not care what happened now that things had reached such a crisis.

Audrey had been standing all this while in the garden path, and the nurse, fascinated by her manner, hurried into the house and fetched the desired likeness. There was a thick mist before Audrey's eyes as she tried to look at it, but in spite of this she recognised too clearly her husband's photograph.

"He—looks very kind—your uncle," she said, managing to control herself sufficiently to speak, for the little child was eagerly watching her.

"He is my dear uncle; but he told me to call him that only when we were by our two selves."

The child spoke wonderfully distinctly and sensibly; and every word he said gave as much pain to poor Audrey as though his tongue were literally a sharp-edged sword.

"You are not well, ma'am!—Will you come in and sit down for a few minutes?" said the nurse, suddenly noticing Audrey's white face and trembling, uncertain manner.

"Thank you," said Audrey. "I am not feeling well, but I am near my home and would rather go back there. Good-bye, little Alick!"

She meant to stoop down and kiss the child, but absolutely could not bring herself to do so; she patted his head with her gloved hand, and hurried out of the garden gate.

As she neared her home, her steps became slower and slower, for the idea which had taken possession of her mind was that perhaps she ought never to go back there.

Perhaps the only thing in life that was left her was to fly from every loved face and familiar association; to disappear from the world that it might never gaze on her wretchedness, and that Audrey Rogers should become a name and nothing more.

It is frequently the most trivial circumstances which determine our fate for us, and it was so in this case. As Audrey hesitated at the gate, whether to enter it or not, her maid came out into the garden to see if she could find her mistress and call her in to afternoon tea. She

caught sight of Audrey, and saw that she looked pale and ill. Being a kindly and observant woman, she said to her: "I have just this moment made the tea, ma'am; I will bring it out for you under the trees, if you would like me to."

"Thank you, Janet; I will come in for it," and Audrey followed her maid indoors. As she sat at her tea, which calmed her, she made up her mind to see her husband once more and to hear what he would say for himself; yes, she would do that.

She was too thoroughly miserable to attend to the small niceties of life. She did not put dessert for dinner, she did not dress herself for her husband's arrival; but in her simple morning frock she stood at the window, gazing out of it with the vacant stare of a pre-absorbed and pained attention.

She heard Alick's latch-key in the front door, and she heard his cheery voice call out for her directly he entered the hall. When she did not answer him, he ran upstairs to their room two steps at a time, calling her as he did so; he came down again in a moment and impatiently pushed open the drawing-room door, and there he saw her, standing with her back to him. He ran up to her gaily, and, putting both his arms round her, he stooped to steal a kiss from her lips. Audrey turned round upon him furiously, forcing herself away from him.

"How dare you insult me by any such caresses?" she cried out, tremblingly.

He looked at her in absolute amazement. Had he only heard what she said and did not see her expression, he might have thought that she spoke in fun; but there was a grim reality in her face which he could not doubt or deny.

"My darling, what on earth do you mean?"

"Do not call me by that name, do not deceive me any longer! Tell me the truth; tell me you have betrayed me, toyed with me—and let me leave you!"

A horrible dread, that she must be mad, arose in Alick's mind. She was neither acting nor playing, and her words were so utterly unreasonable that he could find no clue wherewith to interpret their meaning.

"My dearest Audrey, I do not understand you; I declare I do not. Will you not explain yourself to me?"

"If you persist in this insolence, I will explain in one way only—by leaving you!"

And she took some steps towards the door.

"No, that you shall not do," he said imperatively, putting his back against the door, and firmly grasping both her dear wrists when she came up to him. "You shall not leave this room until you tell me in plain English what you mean."

Woman like, directly he asserted himself she burst into tears; and though she tried to check them, and still to speak angrily and dis-

dainfully, there was a tremor in her voice as she said: "We ought to have been so happy; I had believed we loved each other so dearly."

"And so we do," he replied. "Those wet eyelids of yours tell me that you care for me with all your heart. What wild notion is it that you have got into your head to make you miserable?"

"You are cruel to speak to me so," she said, passionately, turning from him and growing whiter than she had been before; "when there is a little child not two hundred yards away from the house who is—who is—who——"

"My darling Audrey! Is—is it Alick you have been worrying yourself about?"

"His name is Alick—yes."

"Little Alick Somers, my protégé, and——"

"Your protégé!" she scornfully interrupted. "And what else?"

"My nephew."

"That is a convenient name."

"It is a true one. Alick is the son of my unfortunate sister. How is it that you have been troubling yourself about him?"

"Tell me all about it, Alick, and then I will answer your questions," she said, faintly, as she sat down on the sofa, for she saw that he was not deceiving her.

"You have never heard me speak of my sister Maud," he began, sitting down beside her, "because I could only do so with shame; but I will tell you about her now, Audrey. The truest and dearest friend of my life was John Somers. We were at school together, chums and friends at college, and we went into the law together, and seemed likely to get on in it side by side. There are not many fellows in the world so loveable as Jack was, and I believe he could have wooed and won for himself one of the best wives in England; but instead of that, in some strange fit of perversity, he thought that he loved Maud. Perhaps he did; but I felt, at the time, that her being my sister had something to do with it; and though I warned him against her, for I had always known her character too well to admire it, and believed she would never make any husband happy, I was, of course, unfortunately, the original cause of their soon knowing each other."

"Did they marry?"

"Yes, just four years ago, about the time when I first met you, Audrey. Poor Jack! He repented his marriage only once, and that has been always. From the very first, Maud, by her wild extravagance, did her best to ruin him. She never in the least cared for him; and her only ideas of wifely duty were that she should go her own way and enjoy herself as much as she could. They were not wealthy, and she spent more than double their income, doing this so persistently, and indeed secretly, that Jack knew nothing of the large expenditure until the bills began to come in thick and fast upon him.

Also she interfered much with him personally, unfitted him for his office work, and still they fell deeper and deeper into debt."

"But were there no means by which he could have stopped it?" interrupted Audrey, breathlessly.

"Jack was a bit weak, I admit," said Alick, "not to assert his authority, and insist upon his wife behaving herself; but Maud had a most violent temper and a persistent will. At last a crisis came. Jack's affairs became hopelessly involved, and to avoid legal proceedings and inquiries, which might have brought I know not what of unpleasantness, he ran away from the country to escape his creditors. Poor fellow! he believed there was nothing else left for him to do. His wife refused, point blank, to accompany him. She went off to the Continent with some gay friends of her own making and choosing, and there she is living still. She went off before her husband. Their child, who was named Alick, after me, was then two years old, and poor Jack sent for me one evening, only an hour or two before he left England, and begged me for the sake of auld lang syne to look after his boy, and do my best for him. Maud had not taken him with her, and Jack could not take him. 'This is the only comforting piece of the whole business, for I would rather send my child to be brought up at a charity-school than leave him with his mother,' said poor Jack. Of course I promised I would do my best. It was no very pleasant burden, that of a child whose father had been obliged to leave the country for debt, and whose mother will have nothing to do with him; and just at that time, too, my fate, which was in your hands, was trembling in the balance; but I couldn't have failed Jack. And besides the boy was my own sister's child, so that he had claims on me on both sides."

"Alick! Alick!" Audrey whispered, repentantly.

"So I took two rooms in Rose Cottage, near at hand, brought little Alick to it, and engaged a nurse to attend him; and there I expect they will stay until his father comes home again, for Jack is making a good start now in America, and I do not doubt that in a year or two he will be able to pay off every penny he owes and come back to us all."

"But why did you not tell me all this?" Audrey gently asked her husband.

"Because I was a fool, I suppose," he rejoined. "I hated the subject, Audrey. The child is here in hiding, as may be said, lest Jack's creditors should hear of him, and beset me to know where Jack is to be found; and I shrank from telling you of my own sister's folly. Will you forgive me, Audrey?"

She burst into tears and fell into his arms; and there she told her own tale, sobbing with contrition.

"It is I who should ask forgiveness, Alick. Can you forgive me —and love me again?"

"My dear wife, I think this must teach us both a lesson—always in the future to trust each other entirely."

It was a good and generous answer, and Audrey felt it to be such ; and never in her life had she loved her husband so dearly as when she looked into his eyes that evening, and felt that nothing on earth would ever make her doubt him again.

In the morning they went together to Rose Villa to see the little boy. Audrey carried him home with her to spend the day. Henceforth, the little fellow's life would not be so lonely, whether his parents came back to him, or whether they remained in exile.

H. F.

CAPE HORN.

GREAT waters gleam about thy base,
And on thy sombre storm-hewn walls
No clinging ivy tendril crawls ;
But the fierce white foam falls !

High o'er the thunders of the surf,
Where mingled seas from east and west
Wrestle and moan in deep unrest,
The eagle hath her nest !

Forth from the Pole the icebergs sail,
Silver and steel each gleaming spire,
Castles aflame with frosty fire,
Where Death hath his desire !

Swift ships pass by thee, speeding north,
To other lands where skies are bright,
Fearful lest in thy wrathful might
Thou hold them in their flight !

Grim watchman at the southern gates,
Where never sunbeam parts thy cloud,
Enwrapped in thine eternal shroud,
For thee the winds pipe loud !

The strong-winged sea-birds flit and cry,
Wheeling about thy pathless steep
Like ghosts of those who in thy deep
Lie drowned, but cannot sleep !

Where hungry whirlpools grind the rocks,
And countless leagues of storm-vexed main
Shriek at thy feet in frantic pain,
Thou countest up thy slain !

T. S. CUNNINGHAM.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

MORE CHAIRS WERE BROUGHT OUT FOR THE VISITORS, AND AFTERNOON TEA WAS ORDERED.

THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WALKING TO THE COURT.

THERE was one household in Dering whose monotony, through those quiet months of Spring, was that of happy domesticity and enthusiastic labour. That household was Dr. Palmer's.

Charles Carr had not yet succeeded in perfecting the invention which had occupied so much of his time and thoughts since he left Mr. Grale's. His attention had several times been called off to other kinds of work whose success was definite and their reward sure; and though Dr. Palmer was always the first to encourage him in his more ambitious attempts, he was also the last to discourage him in the plain common-sense view of the practical needs of life. "Genius—imaginative, creative, or inventive—will keep," reflected the Doctor.

Lettice was not quite so sure of this. "Hard, practical work may spoil one for other things," she pleaded. "If a man worked in a counting-house or a carpenter's shop, he would be fit for little but rest when he had finished his day's labour. His imagination would be too faint to soar."

"Facts are against you," said Charles Carr. "Shakespeare owned and managed a theatre; Burns held a plough; Spinoza made spectacles. A man cannot help his fellow-creatures unless he knows exactly how they stand, by standing even with them. Why, Lettice, it is the intimate knowledge I got of Mr. Grale's machinery when I was writing in his counting-house, that started me on the quest which is to make my fortune some day! Make my fortune! It is a great leap, Lettice. Do you wonder that I hesitate before I finally gather myself up to pursue it?"

Lettice saw nothing. There was a conscious look on her sweet face. Agnes laughed and lilted:

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small
Who dares not put it to the touch
To gain or lose it all."

Lettice Palmer looked wistfully at her sister. Agnes's laugh was not quite a happy laugh. There had been something about her lately which Lettice could not at all understand. She indulged no more in those dreamy "talks" in which happy girls delight, and for which Lettice often longed. The happy old friendship between her and Edgar Vivian seemed to have come to an end, just when Lettice had hoped it would grow to something more definite. Yet she felt sure Agnes did not love him less.

"Do you treat us to those lines to stimulate my ambition, Agnes?" cried Charles. "I can assure you it does not need stimulating. Having got through my latest bit of 'practical work,' I am once more prepared to 'dream and endeavour.' I am now near success—or failure. Nay, I might almost have decided my fate by this time, if I could only find one of my tools."

"Dear me," said Lettice; "one of your tools! Have you mislaid it?"

"I cannot tell," Charles answered. "I cannot remember when I last had it; but not for a long time. The fact is, it is not mine. Months ago, thinking I might suddenly have occasion for such a thing, I got this one from Mark Acland."

"Mark Acland!" echoed Agnes. "Does he go in for mechanics? I thought he was all poetry and romance."

Her tone was playfully mocking. Mark Acland was an old schoolfellow of Charles's. He was training now for a medical man, and was with a surgeon in general practice at Sladford, a thriving country town a few miles beyond Carstow.

"Acland is a good fellow," observed Charles. "He heard me say I wanted this thing, and he told me he could get it for me, and he got it. I never used it; the trouble at Mr. Grale's occurred about that time, and that is how it went so completely out of my head. Apart from wanting it myself now, I ought to think about returning it to Acland, and I can't find it anywhere."

"Where did you keep it—or put it?" questioned Lettice.

"Well, to tell the truth, Lettice, that has gone out of my mind as completely as the instrument itself seems to have gone. When it first came to me, I put it in the drawer of my desk at the counting-house ——"

"It may be there still," interrupted Lettice.

"No. I think I must have brought it home with me. I meant to bring it. I know it was not in the drawer the day the desks and places were being searched by Mr. Grale. If it had been there, I could not have failed to see it."

Charles Carr alluded to that past incident without any bitterness. The wrong had been set right, and it had left no gall in his sweet nature. Since Mr. Grale's conversation respecting Charles with Dr. Palmer, the manufacturer had given the young man many valuable

suggestions concerning his invention, and had offered him every facility for experiment among his machinery.

"Nothing of much consequence was in your desk that day, I fancy, except the mysterious manuscript," laughed Agnes. "Is it destroyed, Charlie?"

"Never mind the manuscript," replied Charlie, his face flushing.

"What sort of an instrument was it—the one you have mislaid?" she asked.

"It is a watchmaker's hammer," he replied. "I think I'll go down to the works this afternoon and ask the counting-house clerks if they remember seeing such a thing."

"Why yes, that's what you ought to do, Charles. It may be lying about there yet, in some corner or other."

In the afternoon Charles started upon his expedition. Later, Lettice set off to walk to the Court. Agnes would not go with her; she seemed never to care to go there now. It was a lovely day; and the scenery was fair, around. But there can be no fair picture without shadows; and in the time of our sunshine these shadows are cast by the sorrows of others.

Charles walked straight into the counting-house. He was very welcome there. He had always been a favourite, and everybody was glad when the cloud was lifted off him, especially as it proved Mr. Grale to be in the wrong.

"I am come in to ask if any of you have seen a watchmaker's hammer lying about," began Charles.

The clerks turned their faces towards him.

"A watchmaker's hammer!" echoed one. "No; I've not."

"I remember seeing such a thing," spoke up Mr. Wilton. "And I remember ——"

"Why that there must be what the master wanted," interrupted the office boy eagerly. "He set us hunting for it."

"Speak when you are spoken to," said Mr. Wilton, sharply to the boy. "I was about to add, Mr. Carr, that such an instrument as you speak of was lying about, and when it was wanted, it could not be found. It was sought for high and low."

"We did not know whose it was," said Mr. Mawson. "Nobody claimed it, and we supposed it must belong to the man who had come to mend the Mill clock, and that he had taken it away with him."

Charles reflected. "He may have mistaken it for a tool of his own," he said. "When was that?"

"Oh, a long while ago. It was last year."

"It was before the young master went away," again put in the boy, regardless of reproof. "I remember his standing by the man while he was about the clock, and talking to him."

Old Mr. Wilton looked at the boy severely. Nobody ever spoke of the young master now, save, perhaps, in a whisper. Allan Grale's

prolonged absence, and the lack of any news of him, was creating a very uncomfortable sensation in many minds regarding him.

"Speaking of the young master puts me in mind of the time," said Mr. Mawson, in a low tone. "The clock was mended very shortly before he went away; I am sure of that. It must have been somewhere about the middle of October, Mr. Carr."

"And you don't remember seeing the hammer since then, Mr. Mawson?" asked Charles.

"No; that was what we all said when Mr. Grale asked for it. None of us could remember seeing it since the clockmaker was here. I think it was two or three weeks after the clock was mended that the master asked for it."

"October," mused Charles, aloud, "and now we are at the end of May—so it is getting on for eight months since the thing vanished. Well, I must get another, if it can't be found. It was a borrowed article. I dare say the young fellow who lent it me thinks I mean to stick to it."

After leaving the works, Charles encountered Lettice Palmer. He told her that his errand had been fruitless: bringing only the poor satisfaction of knowing that the hammer had been lost at the Mills, instead of being mislaid at home.

"But if you left it lying about when you were there," said Lettice, "the sight of it ought to have reminded you to take care of it."

"So one would say," answered Charles. "Yet perhaps I had eyes for nothing but my papers, Lettice."

He wanted her to say something about the "mysterious manuscript," as Agnes would certainly have done. Charles was in high spirits to-day. Although he never mentioned his chance of "success," without hinting at the possibility of "failure," yet he felt pretty well secure of it now.

Lettice did not take the hint. She walked on demurely, though with a slightly-heightened colour.

"You take no interest in my papers, do you, Lettice?" he remarked. "Not even in what Agnes calls the 'mysterious manuscript?' You have not as much curiosity as she has."

"Nor so great a love of teasing," returned Lettice. "If you wish to show it to us, you will do so."

"Some day," he answered.

"When you think right," said Lettice again, walking very erectly.

"When I'm an inventor with a fortune in prospect. That will be time enough. I shall be able to afford being laughed at then."

"If you cannot trust your friends not to laugh at you now, I should not care to trust them then. But men feel so differently from women. Men cannot risk their dignity even to assure themselves of—anything!"

"I think you are rather hard on me there, if you include me in that category," said Charles. "One might be prepared to risk one's

own dignity—even to be pitied—but not if there were any chance of such pity costing too much to those who bestow it."

"It may cost them more not to be allowed to give it!" returned Lettice.

"It is odd," said Charlie, walking close by her side, and lowering his voice a little, "that we too have got into a discussion on the subject of that manuscript of mine—that question of speaking out or keeping silence. For it is a manuscript story, Lettice."

"Is it?" said she, briefly. She was not going to invite his confidence, though she had longed for it. It seemed coming now, and she began to feel a little afraid:—as if she would not have objected to some further delay.

"It is a manuscript story," Charles continued, with a sudden, almost reckless courage, born of hope, and flushed with the golden opportunity of that afternoon walk in the sunshiny solitude. "A love story, Lettice. I can give you the outline of it now."

"That will spoil the perusal, you know, when the time comes for that," she observed, with her strange shrinking.

"I don't think so," said Charles. "There is not much plot. The story turns on a question of right and wrong. A man loves a woman, and is not sure whether he ought even to let her know it!"

"Of course he should," Lettice answered. "How does he know that she may not love him?—and she cannot let him know it, you know."

"But if it would be to her disadvantage to care for him, and if he keeps his own secret, she will soon forget her love," he urged. "She will refuse to recognise it as love. It will die at the very root. And her life will go on prosperously without it."

"She may refuse to recognise it as love, but she will not be able to love anybody else," spoke Lettice, timidly. "Her life will go on well enough, of course, but there will be a difference."

"Still there is much to be said for the man's keeping silence," remarked Charles. "Few people would think his silence needed justification;—they would praise it. And he would have always hope that a time was coming when he would be free to speak."

"Yes," said Lettice, with a fine scorn in her low voice, "he might think so little of his own love, and of the nature of her to whom he offered it, that he might prefer to tender it with a makeweight of silk dresses and dinner-parties! It is a wonder that bank-notes have not quite superseded love-letters."

Lettice was borrowing this from her father; she had heard him give utterance to much the same sentiments. Some mothers would have decided that the Doctor was not a man to have the rearing of daughters!

"Well, in my story, I tried to set forth both sides of the case," proceeded Charles.

"We are close to the Court," interrupted Lettice; "it is no use

beginning to tell me now. But, believe me, Charlie, true women like to be generous once or twice in their lives. I do believe that is why they so often cling to very worthless men—because those are always willing to be helped and served. You good men want to be always giving—and it is only the meanest of us who wish to be for ever getting. It ought to be mutual, both ways, or else one or the other misses the sweetest bit of life."

"I'll give you my manuscript to read this very evening, Lettice," decided Mr. Carr.

They were in the Court Avenue now.

General Vivian, who in the past few weeks had grown surprisingly better, and his wife were out driving, but Miss Vivian was at home. Everything about Maria seemed but the ghost of what it had been—her smile, her voice, her hand, all were ghostly. She received her visitors in the morning-room—that pleasant chamber where she had formerly spent so much of her time. But now it had somehow a discarded look; the flower-stand was empty, no signs of occupation lay about, for Maria stayed much in her own room. She kissed Lettice and asked after Agnes, and welcomed Charles Carr with a strange deprecating kindliness which made the young man feel quite shy. She seemed at a loss for conversation; indeed it flagged with them all. Lettice asked Maria if her brothers were well.

Yes, Maria answered, they were well: but George was not at home. He often ran away for a few days—young men liked change—and he was away now; she thought in Edinburgh. Of Edgar she made no mention by name.

After this, topics of interest being apparently scarce, gossip was introduced. Lettice mentioned that she had seen Miss Grale a day or two ago, who had said that their young parlour-maid, Susan, was to be married, in the autumn, to Joe Massey.

"Indeed," said Maria, aroused to a faint interest, for Susan had been her best scholar in the Sunday school, and she liked the girl. "It is rather premature, is it not? They are both young enough to wait a little."

"Of course they are," assented Lettice; "and of course they have no prudence at all. Joe Massey has been raised to a better post and to better wages, and so they intend to take advantage of it."

"Is Mrs. Massey pleased at it?" asked Maria.

"Mrs. Massey is as pleased as she ever is about anything," returned Lettice. "They have asked her to go and live with them in London, but she won't leave Dering."

"One reason that she gives as an objection to move is, that she will not burden them with the expense of having to bring her back to bury her beside her old man," interposed Charles Carr, with a slight laugh. "Mrs. Massey is fond of looking on the shady side, as you must know, Miss Vivian."

"Yes," replied Maria, faintly smiling. "She came here last week,

quite upset, having discovered that her lodger wears a wedding-ring ; a fact which she had failed to notice before."

"Her lodger?" interrupted Lettice; "Oh, you must mean the yellow woman!"

"The yellow woman, as she is called," assented Maria. "Poor Mrs. Massey thinks it extremely wrong—'leastways, bewildering, ma'am,' she said to me—that Miss West, or Miss anybody else, should put on a wedding-ring. As she had asked my advice about taking the young woman to lodge with her, she considered it her duty to inform me as to the new trouble, and enquire what I thought of it."

"Silly old thing!" exclaimed Lettice. "I have known many young women who wore their own dead mothers' wedding-rings."

"But not on the wedding finger," said Maria, looking at her own right hand, where her mother's wedding-ring lay loosely, under a half-hoop of diamonds rather dim in their old setting. "I suggested to Mrs. Massey," she continued, "that probably poor Miss West, who seems lonely and friendless, has had some sad story of her own which she has had to live through. I think it not at all unlikely," added Maria, "for she appears to be a woman of sorrow."

"And quite mysterious with it," said Lettice.

"Mystery and sadness often go together," sighed Miss Vivian.

"*She* is sad," thought Lettice, with pity for Maria. "I wonder if it is about Allan Grale? I am sure there is some mystery connected with this strange absence of his."

"You should take a walk this fine afternoon, Miss Vivian," suggested Charles Carr. "It is most delightful out of doors."

"Won't you go back with us, Maria, and have tea?" cried Lettice, eagerly. "In the sunshine it is as bright and hot as summer."

"Too sunny for me," said Maria.

"We will not go home along the hot road," said Lettice; "we will strike into the woods and go round by the Black Pool. It is always shady there. Do come, Maria."

Maria Vivian's face grew white. "No, no," she cried, putting up her hands with a gesture which must have meant only dissent, but which strongly suggested horror. "No, no—I never go out in the sunshine now. It makes my head ache."

"But we could keep in the shadow of the trees all the way," pleaded Lettice again, hardly understanding. "Charles will see you back to the Court later."

"In the shadow," echoed Maria: "Yes—I know—in the shadow! Not to-day, dear Lettice, thank you."

So they walked home alone, mostly in silence. The visit had depressed both of them. Lettice was thinking how worn and sad Maria looked. Once she roused herself to speak.

"Do you fancy, Charles, it can be Allan Grale's prolonged absence which is telling upon her?"

"Perhaps," answered Charles. "But she must be in a nervous

state altogether. She turned pale at the mention of the Black Pool."

As they were about to enter Dr. Palmer's house, Charles Carr took a roll of paper from his pocket and handed it to Lettice.

"There," said he, "that's the mysterious manuscript. Now, you are not to let anybody else see it, not even Agnes, until you have given me your opinion upon it."

"What, did you have it with you all this time!" she exclaimed. "How does it end? From what you have hinted, I am not at all sure I shall like it."

"If you like the beginning, I can easily re-write it with a different ending," he answered. "And I can change the names too, if you wish it."

CHAPTER XXIX.

CALLED IN TO MRS. GRALE.

In the course of the evening, Lettice Palmer stole away to her own room to read Charles's manuscript. She felt almost guilty, in having, perhaps for the first time in her life, a secret from Agnes.

The little tale, entitled "The Romance of Mark Bedell," was a very simple story. There was a friendless young fellow, named "Mark Bedell," and there was his patron, the village pastor, Mr. Pilgrim, who had two daughters, Lily and Alice. And Lily was beloved by Mark Bedell: and at first it was a love full of hope which stimulated his ambition. He worked hard, continuously; he was an artist, and at last he overworked, so that his eyesight failed him, at least for a time. And then he slowly woke to the fact that others, far above him, were ready to woo and wed the gentle Pilgrim girls. Did Lily really care for him? or was she only kind and tender to his loneliness and weakness? Nature did the work of art in the story at this point of narrating how his hopes would veer through doubt into despondency. Lettice blushed in the twilight as she recalled the true basis of many a little fact set forth in the tale, of whose working in and effect upon Charles's mind she was only now aware. But all of a sudden she sprang to her feet, the roses burning hotly in her cheeks. It was as if a mask slipped aside—as if the puppets of a play suddenly ceased their mechanical mimicry, and stretched warm hands towards her.

For there, on one of the later pages, the young author's pen had slipped, and he had written, instead of Lily Pilgrim—Lettice Palmer.

There was not much more to read after that, and what there was, was sad. For this Mark Bedell never told his love, but made Lily Pilgrim believe him cold, even indifferent and ungrateful. So Lily married somebody else—somebody well-born and wealthy, and she and Mark met no more. Only after the artist, Bedell, was dead, the critics began to remark that in every picture of his there appeared, in some form or other—one face. Now it was in a foremost personage,

then it was peering out of a crowd, now it was young and fair, then old and sweet, now laughing, then sad. But always one face. And when there was a collection of the Bedell pictures, Lily and her husband visited it. And the husband, noticing this ever-present face, cried, "Why, Lily, it is yours!"

And the story ended with Lily's answer. "I must have haunted him, because after all my father's kindness, he proved so negligent and ungrateful.

Lettice sat there in the fading glory of the summer night. Through the open window, she could hear voices in the room below her, she heard the drawing of the curtains, and knew that the lamp was lit. She heard Agnes's voice, steadily going on, reading the newspaper to the weary doctor. But she could not go down. To-night she was in harmony with the light dying in the west, and the stars coming slowly out, and the whispering trees in the mystic twilight, rather than with the pretty room, with its genial lamp, and its books, and its work-basket.

Presently there was a rap at the door, and Charles's voice speaking softly:

"Come out into the garden, Lettice."

She went. He awaited her under the ivy-clad porch at the back of the house. He held out his hand, and hers slipped into it. That was a moment by itself in all their lives.

"You have read it," he whispered presently.

"Yes," she said. "And oh, I like it—except the end."

"You have altered the end," he answered softly. And again there was a silence.

"Did you notice a slip once—in the names?" he asked, by-and-bye.

"Yes," she faltered.

"I noticed it myself, the moment it was written," said Charles. "But I could not bear to erase—your name. Its coming by accident seemed like a good omen. And that was why I could not show the manuscript to Mr. Grale."

"I never could help wondering why you were so persistent," Lettice remarked. "It did not seem like you. But you showed it to papa."

"That was different," said Charles. "Besides, I *had* to show it to him."

"Somebody else must have seen that manuscript," mused Lettice. "Was it not the name, Mark Bedell, which made so much mischief?"

"I can never understand that," quickly answered Charles. "Either somebody must have had a master-key to my desk; or I may have absently written 'Mark Bedell' on some piece of paper—in trying a pen perhaps—and left it about."

"Did you never leave the manuscript itself about?"

"I think not, Lettice. I know I am absent-minded at times, but I hardly think I should have been so stupid as that."

"Will the matter ever be made clear, I wonder?"

Charles did not answer. Even he had had his own thoughts lately. Village gossip was growing more and more definite, concerning Allan Grale's curious departure and his continued absence, and Charles was trying to put two and two together. He had heard what Dering said, and he had listened to that talkative girl, Susan. The version, taken up by the village gossips now was, that Mr. Edgar Vivian had never considered Mr. Grale's son to be a suitable match for his sister; and that he had suddenly interfered to prevent it; that he had, in some way, acquired a hold upon the young man, and had forced him to leave Dering, and to keep away from it. To that arbitrary measure, Miss Vivian's recent ill-health and sad looks were attributed. Charles Carr believed this version of the matter to be absurd; but he thought it not unlikely that the two young men might have fallen into some trouble involving pecuniary liabilities, which they could neither meet nor speak of.

"That suspicion cast on me by Mr. Grale—the remembrance of it does not trouble you, Lettice, does it?" questioned Charles, breaking the silence.

"The very idea!" she exclaimed. "How can you be so silly, Charles?"

Then the two entered upon a long talk about the past, the present, and the future, on which it would not be gracious in us to intrude. One comfort is, that in those interesting cases where "two are company and three are none," a third person would generally find himself quite as much bored as he would be found boring.

They went in at last, the soothing monotony of Agnes' reading having long ceased. She escaped from the room as they entered it.

"Lettice has been reading my story, this evening, sir," began young Carr, all in a tremor.

"Oh, indeed," said the doctor, drily. "And did she not advise you to revise it very carefully before you make it public property?"

The words were a little sharp, and there was a little sharpness in the tone. Nevertheless, in the good Doctor's eyes, there might be detected a certain encouragement if read aright.

"It is to be revised from the beginning," returned Charles. "Lettice thinks some of my chance variations are improvements," he went on, scarcely knowing where his courage came from. "And the end, sir, is to be quite different."

"Well, well, well," said the doctor, softening, and brushing something from his eyes.

"You are not angry, papa?" whispered Lettice. "Nothing can be changed for a long while yet, and very likely—I hope we shall be all able to go on living together. There are such a few of us!"

Her father turned upon her, with a sudden, determined brightness. "Aye, aye," he said, "it is quite time for a grandpapa's chair to be getting ready for me! That won't be ready just yet, though."

"It is all Lettice's fault that I showed her the manuscript so soon," put in Charles, playfully. "She said men were so mean that they would not allow women to be generous, would not offer themselves to them till they could imagine it was the women's interest to take them. What could I do, sir, after that?"

"Everything has been Eve's fault from the beginning," cried Lettice, laughing. "And where is Agnes, papa?"

"Gone to bed, I think," answered the Doctor. "She wished me good night. And you had better go also, Lettice, and tell her your news; and then I expect neither of you will close your eyes till daybreak."

Lettice found that her sister had really gone to bed. She had even put out the candle. Somehow Lettice did not care to light it again. By merely drawing the curtain a little she could let in a flood of moonlight.

Lettice told her news with her head buried on her sister's shoulder. Agnes drew herself just a little away, and said quietly:

"I knew it would come, sooner or later, dear." Then she put her arms round Lettice, and kissed her tenderly, and they remained for a while in silence.

"What are you thinking about, dear?" asked Lettice very softly

"I was thinking of Maria Vivian," answered Agnes in the same low tone.

"Why! so was I!" whispered Lettice.

And so it ever is. The cross of patient suffering—the sacrifice of the innocent for the guilty—is the world-fact which draws all hearts and dominates all life. We lay its symbol on the bier of our dead; we make it on the brow of innocent infancy; we rear it above our marriage altars.

Dr. Palmer, who never went to bed very much betimes lest he should be called out of it again, sat on alone, thinking of the news he had heard and of the future of his daughter; and Charles Carr was at his open window above, gazing at the stars, after the fashion of a romantic lover, when steps on the garden path proclaimed the advent of a night visitor.

"Bother!" said the Doctor; for he well knew what that meant. "No bed at all for me now, I expect."

But the Doctor was wrong. Bed there would be for him, though not just yet. The parlour-maid opened the door, and told her master that James, from Moorland House, was asking to see him.

"Why, who can be ill there?" cried the Doctor to himself, as he went into the hall. "Is it you, James? What's the matter?"

James explained that his mistress was ill. Not to say downright ill, the man added, but depressed and weak, and she had just had a fit of hysterics, which frightened them. Her maid, Pettham, thought it must be all through the sleepless nights she got now; and they had

sent him to ask Dr. Palmer for a sleeping draught, and hoped he would excuse its being near eleven o'clock.

Telling James he would bring the draught round himself, the Doctor turned into his surgery. He thought it might be as well if he saw Mrs. Grale; in his opinion, she had latterly been looking very ill. Getting what he wanted, he followed James.

The prolonged waiting for her son, ever looking for him by night and by day, and the despairing disappointment when he never came, had at length told upon Mrs. Grale. The once plump woman was wearing to a shadow; her cheeks became thin, her eyes sad; and not being able to talk about the matter—for Mr. Grale would not let her—kept away the little consolation which that might have imparted. This afternoon's post had brought her another letter from her sister in Scotland. The Savoch letters came pretty frequently now; once a month, or so; and their principal theme was ever the same: Mrs. Gibson's uneasiness and Mrs. Gibson's dreams. The dreams were much the same as the first one had been—ever some grievous distress connected with a weird, dark-looking pool, in which distress Mrs. Grale seemed to share. The present letter contained, amidst other items, the following passage:

"You still tell me, Polly, that Allan's not come home yet and that you can't hear of him anyway. I'd not like to make you uneasy for nothing, but don't you think some harm must have happened to him? He appears in these dreams of mine (as well as that other person I've mentioned to you), and both of them with the palest and saddest faces you ever saw."

This was quite enough to upset Mrs. Grale. After an hour or two of giving way, her distress culminated in a violent fit of sobbing and crying, which alarmed her maid. Mrs. Grale was at home alone. Mr. Grale had run up to London for a couple of days on business; Mary Anne had gone to assist at the celebration of the wedding of a young friend at Carstow, and would not return home until the morrow.

"Pettham called it a fit of hysterics, Doctor, but 'twas nothing o' the sort," said Mrs. Grale despairingly to Dr. Palmer, when he had arrived and they were sitting together. "I never had hysterics in my life; I'm not a fine lady; it was just a fit of sobbing that I couldn't keep down."

"You have looked sad and ill of late, my dear lady," said the Doctor, soothingly. "I have remarked it. I fear you are fretting after your son."

Melted by the words and tone, for they bore, perhaps unconsciously to the speaker himself, a strangely mournful sympathy, Mrs. Grale and her reticence broke down together. Without any reserve, she sobbingly imparted to Dr. Palmer all the uneasy sorrow of the past, as connected with Allan, including Mrs. Gibson's dreams, and the dream, so similar in its features to those, which visited herself the very night

of Allan's disappearance; and she ended by reading aloud Mrs. Gibson's last letter.

"That dreadful Black Pool comes into Marget's dreams, as it came into my dream, you see," she concluded, folding the letter. "It must be that: there can't be another such a dark and dreary spot, nor here nor in Scotland. And it frightens me, Dr. Palmer."

"Frightens you?" he repeated slowly, as if his thoughts were away just now.

"I get wondering whether any ill happened to Alny that night. It was thought, you know, that the Black Pool was the place he went to, to meet Edgar Vivian. Doctor," she whispered, a fit of tremor shaking her, "*can he be lying in it?*"

Dr. Palmer did his best to calm Mrs. Grale's fancies, administered a sedative, and departed.

It was not his place to speak; he would not be the one to bring an evil deed to light and disturb a peaceful community: but the Doctor had not felt easy in his own mind ever since the conversation with old Brice. No, nor for some little time before that.

CHAPTER XXX.

A TELEGRAM

THERE followed a week or two of very unseasonable and rainy weather at Dering. George Vivian, who was back again with renewed freshness on his refined face and with his usual vivacity, found time hang heavily on his hands at the Court, and openly reproached the skies for looking black and angry in the sweet month of June.

There was a restlessness in his manner, not very difficult to detect, had anybody watched him closely. In a month or two, George would very much need to be away again; this time for a longer period; and he knew not how to obtain the General's consent. This rather worried him.

At last there came a bright day of sunshine, following on the weeks of gloom, which enabled people to go abroad once more. Mary Anne Grale proposed a drive to the Court.

Mrs. Grale objected. "I'm not equal to visiting," she said. "My spirits are low."

"And the more you stop at home, the lower they'll get," responded Mary Anne, who sometimes reproached her mother with "giving way;" though she knew nothing of the one great giving way which had called for a visit from Dr. Palmer, the household having been requested by their mistress not to speak of it. "Put your things on, mamma; I shall order the carriage."

Mary Anne Grale's temper had not been very good lately. She had never forgotten that episode in the London draper's shop; and

somehow she was very curious about George Vivian's visits to Edinburgh.

Mrs. Grale, always persuadable, and domineered over by Mary Anne, got ready and they started. At the Court they found General and Mrs. Vivian and George all sitting on the terrace outside the drawing-room windows. The General was enjoying the sunshine. More chairs were brought out for the visitors, and afternoon tea was ordered.

"The climate seems to be getting worse and worse," observed Mrs. Grale, in answer to a remark of the General's. "I never knew such a rainy time as this, close upon midsummer."

"Mr. Vivian used up all the sunshine during his last holiday," said Mary Anne, laughing. "I remember we had delicious weather while you were in Edinburgh," she went on, turning to George. "I think there was scarcely a shower all the while you were away."

"Not one—at least not in the daytime," he answered. "During all my voyage North the sea was like glass."

That voyage was a puzzle to Mary Anne. She did not understand that just now. George had to use a health pretext to get any freedom at all. It seemed to her, with her conscious knowledge of that scene in the mercer's shop, that possibly there was some attraction for the young man in the North. Yet if so, how came he to waste so much of such a brief holiday in the solitary tedium of a voyage?

"Had you many fellow passengers on board?" she asked carelessly.

"Very few," he replied. "The holiday season had not begun. "There were some young people going down to school at St. Andrew's—some Americans fresh from New York, and two missionary ladies home on leave from India. So we were 'quite select' in the saloon. I thought my journey was to be rather dreary at first, but the Indian ladies and the Americans proved very interesting and pleasant."

This certainly did not look as though George had joined any party. Yet if the "attraction" was in Edinburgh, surely that had not been the destination of the rich and pretty but quite common-place purchases she had seen him make in London. Every article on the Bond Street counter might have been readily procured in Prince's Street.

"What a magnificent city Edinburgh is," said Miss Grale. "We have only stayed there a few days en route to the West Coast and to Skye. I suppose it is a pleasant place to live in? One always hears a great deal of Edinburgh society."

"In that respect it is not what it was in the past," answered George. "Now-a-days, the city is at once too large and too small. There is all the difference between its past and its present that there is between its Old Town and its New."

"Surely the New Town is an improvement on the Old!" exclaimed Mary Anne, astonished. "I remember being quite struck with the

number of beautifully kept, broad, uniform streets, evidently all inhabited by people of wealth and importance."

"But does it not strike you as a little strange when people of wealth and importance are all content to live in houses exactly alike?" asked George, "as if they had no more individuality than sand-martins or bees!"

"But think of the old drainage!" said Mary Anne.

George could not restrain a sudden laugh. "I am not going to defend the defects of the old," he explained, "but I think they might be remedied without abolishing its beauties."

"I suppose you have many friends in Edinburgh, Mr. George?"

"No," he answered quite frankly. "I had in the days gone by; but death broke up the households so effectually that now I have not one friend left in the city. Of course I have a few acquaintances."

"And I suppose this would be a favourable time of the year for finding everybody at home," remarked Mary Anne.

"Yes," said George, "it is. But I did not trouble my acquaintances much, for I did not call upon them."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the young lady. "How did you while away your time?"

"My eyes were longing for change," laughed George. "Fresh objects seemed to refresh them, like turning them upon grey or green after staring at scarlet. I have seen nothing but Dering so long ——"

"I don't admire your comparison, George," interrupted the General. "If you had seen nothing but Dering, you had seen nothing but grey and green; and for change you must have wanted dazzling colours, rather than subdued ones."

George turned it off jokingly. "Well, uncle, I mean it was refreshing to visit old scenes and places, which I do not see often."

"Did you do any sketching?" asked Miss Grale.

George hesitated. "Very little," he said. "Very little indeed."

"You have shown us absolutely nothing, George," commented Mrs. Vivian, in that clear, low voice of hers, which always seemed to cut like a knife into the conversation.

"I think you should show us what you have done, George, however little it may be," said his uncle. "I know a scene I like when I see it, but a good picture of it sometimes explains to me why I like it. George's sketches have often done so."

"That is what is called interpreting nature," said Mrs. Vivian again. "And a very poor picture may well do that better than most people can do it for themselves."

"Oh, Mr. Vivian, you must really be persuaded," cried Mary Anne. "Your dear aunt tells you to put aside the pretence of modesty. I'm sure you are able to interpret better than we can understand."

Mrs. Vivian gave one flashing glance from her soft white knitting. Was it possible that with due training and development, Mary Anne Grale, the rich manufacturer's daughter, almost without a grandfather,

might match and rival herself, who laid shadowy claims to the blood of the Plantagenets?

"I have said that I have absolutely nothing to show," asserted George. And this time, both his uncle and Miss Grale understood that no further entreaty was to be tendered.

The General felt that the conversation wanted shifting a little. A man of war from his youth, he had yet always had a peculiar shrinking from all moral and mental jars. His nephew, George, had once said that he believed his uncle had married his wife out of sheer admiration for her skill and endurance in those society skirmishes from which he fled.

"I can understand the pleasure of going back to old sightseeings after a spell of dreary monotony," he remarked. "When I returned from the Red River in 1870, I was detained two or three days in London before I could get to Dering, and I can tell you, I went to every place where I had been taken in my holidays from school—to the Monument, and the Abbey, and the Cathedral; aye, and to Madame Tussaud's and the Lowther Arcade! Every place was a treat after that endless prairie."

"Oh, yes," said Mary Anne. "The endless prairies——"

"And the Red Indians, and the queer kind of food," interrupted Mrs. Grale.

"But Dering is not the endless prairie. I should not have thought Mr. Vivian would have grown so weary of sweet Dering woods," Mary Anne went on, sentimentally.

"He will be wearying of Dering people next; if he has not done so already," said Mrs. Grale, with a faint smile. "But that may be easily remedied. There are plenty of new people who will be very glad to come to Dering."

For which speech Mary Anne could have shaken her mother. People in society did not give out hints of that kind! But a diversion was created by the sight of a railway porter coming up the avenue with a telegram.

Mrs. Grale's thoughts flew to Corrabuin; and all the sick suspense, which she daily had to suppress, returned upon her. She forgot the possibilities of the incident; she forgot her manners. "Oh, is not that for me!" she cried. "I have been expecting one for—oh, so long! They may have sent the man after us from Moorland House."

"It is not likely they would send after us," said Mary Anne, frigidly. She added in a terrible whisper, "Mother, sit still." For the poor lady was fain to rise, in readiness to receive the telegram.

George Vivian stepped to the terrace steps and took the missive from the man.

"I am sorry, Mrs. Grale," he said, quietly, "but it is for me."

Mrs. Grale heaved a sigh. George did not seem in any hurry to open the envelope. Mrs. Vivian spoke.

"Have you no impatience, George? Even the conventional

apology for opening letters is, I believe, waived in the case of telegrams."

George took the hint. Perhaps it reminded him that to keep a telegram unopened might be at least as significant as to open it with undue eagerness.

The words within were evidently few enough. Mrs. Vivian flashed on him one of her glances at the very instant when their meaning was entering his brain. His face was absolutely impassive : his guard on every feature was resolute. But that it did not relax was sufficient proof to his aunt that whatever news he had received was not what he had hoped for.

"A message concerning a little matter only interesting to myself," he said, as he carefully folded the telegram, restored it to its envelope, and put it in his pocket.

"We elders," said the General to Mrs. Grale, "are hardly able to get over our early impressions of telegrams. In our younger days they were rarely used except for tidings of moment—generally, of disaster or death. The very coming in of a telegram prepared one, as it were, for a shock. Now-a-days it probably comes to say that you have left your umbrella somewhere and it is being sent after you by parcel delivery.

Shortly afterwards Mrs. Grale and her daughter departed, George attending them to their carriage. Once seated in it, Mary Anne gave her mother a sharp little lecture, connected with observing proper manners, and with her misplaced joke about George Vivian's possible weariness of Dering people. Mrs. Grale made a faint defence.

"You seemed so sorry that he should be tired of Dering," she said. "Now a person is never tired of a place till he is tired of the people in it. Saying the one thing was saying the other, Mary Anne, only in a different way."

"The way in which a thing is said makes all the difference," snapped Mary Anne.

"Well, to be sure ! " sighed poor Mrs. Grale. "I'm willing to do my best, but I'm sure I've often made chance remarks like that before, without your taking me up so smartly."

This was a hint that Mary Anne was in an ill temper, and the young lady knew that perfectly. There was something behind George Vivian's visit to Edinburgh that she did not understand, and his apparent frankness had not been a perfect frankness. To go wandering about alone, looking at bloodstains in Holyrood palace, and "rasping the ring" on the doors of John Knox's house, could never have been the all-sufficing enjoyment chosen by George Vivian for his holiday. And then that telegram !

As a matter of fact, George might have shown his telegram to the whole party, and they would have been only the more mystified. It was dated from "Ragan, Ross-shire." And its brief purport was this :

"He came too soon and he is gone again."

But Mary Anne Grale, sitting in silence, as they drove along the sunny lanes, firmly believed that she might have solved a secret, could she have got one look at that flimsy scrap of paper. Her reverie was interrupted by her mother suddenly grasping her arm.

"Look, Mary Anne! Look at that group of people! Something must be the matter: they are hastening to Dr. Palmer's. Let us stop the horses."

She was rising to seize the check-string, but Mary Anne arrested her hand.

"Please do nothing of the sort, mamma," she said. "It is probably an accident to some workman at papa's machinery. Everything necessary will be done without us. How you do excite yourself! It is very bad taste."

CHAPTER XXXI.

SOMETHING FOUND.

EARLIER in that same afternoon, two Dering village boys, Daniel and John Rafe, had gone cutting sticks in the woodland lying round the Black Pool. Now the waters of the Pool were surrounded by a rising grassy bank. On the top of their slight elevation grew a belt of bramble, running all round the Pool, and making a sort of natural fencing, enclosing it and the green bank. Behind these brambles lay a sort of rough grassy path, and the whole was made into a kind of amphitheatre by grand old trees.

The boys' stick-cutting had been chiefly carried on amid the brambles, among which they tore and trampled freely, throwing the wands they broke clear out of the bushes upon the grassy path, where they would gather them up and finish them at their leisure. It was when they had concluded their work of destruction, and came out upon the clearing to collect their spoils, that they found a stick which certainly they had not broken off on that afternoon or on any other. Each pounced upon it to secure it for himself, and each drew back without touching it.

For they recognised the stick as belonging to Allan Grale. It had been presented to him only two years before, by the village cricket-club, which he had promoted and patronized. It was a hazel shepherd's crook, and Allan's name and the occasion was duly set forth on a silver ring, with which it was mounted, but which was now sadly dimmed and defaced by damp.

The brothers felt rather dazed. "Mr. Allan must have left it here before he went away," whispered John. "It's odd that nobody has found it afore now!"

"Nobody never comes round this way," said Daniel; "it don't lead to nowhere."

"I say, d'ye think we should leave it here, Dan, and say nought about finding it?" cried the elder boy.

"What for?" said the bolder Dan. "We didn't go to find it; we see it lying here, we couldn't help finding of it. They can't do nothing to us for that."

Marking the exact spot where the stick had lain, the boys went slowly towards the high road, carrying it with them. There they met nurse Kate, Mrs. Grale's old servant, and showed her the stick. It threw her into considerable agitation.

"That stick has not come up for nothing," said she, with a dreary emphasis. "But don't you go taking it to Moorland House, you boys, a-frightening the poor missis. You take it straight to Dr. Palmer's, and tell him where you found it. He is a kind and clever gentleman, and will know what to think on't, and what will be right to do."

The two lads followed the advice, and turned towards Dr. Palmer's. But it was not to be expected that they could pass their friends and neighbours on the road without pouring forth the news, so that a good many people collected about them—and that was the small crowd seen by Mrs. Grale from her carriage. Various comments were made, and covert hints dropped as to the depth of the Black Pool and its capacity for keeping all sorts of terrible secrets. For a fear had suddenly arisen that young Mr. Grale might have been drowned in it.

The village shoemaker, David Sherlock, who liked to be first and foremost in all matters of public gossip, undertook to explain for the two boys at Dr. Palmer's. But when they reached the house, only the young ladies were at home. Agnes and her sister came forward, and heard all there was to hear. It was decided that the stick should be left in the hall, to await the return of the Doctor.

"And please," said Agnes, "will none of you talk about this for an hour or two—not till you have heard from papa; or some exaggerated and alarming report might get carried to the family at Moorland House."

The shoemaker could not resist giving himself the importance of a last word. Allowing his neighbours to pass out, he lingered behind.

"I reckon there's trouble in store for that house, young ladies. I'm much afeard on't."

Agnes laid her hand on her sister's shoulder as soon as they were alone. "Maria Vivian has been right, Lettice. She always said that Allan was dead."

There, on the hall table, where John Rafe had put it down, lay the stick, which both of the girls knew quite well. They could not leave it there. Agnes lifted it up, carried it into the dining-room, and laid it across the arms of her father's big chair.

She shivered as she did so. "Shut the window, Letty," she said: "surely the day is growing chilly."

Lettice obeyed: but as she did so, she said, "I don't think the chill is in the air, I think it is in us." Which Agnes knew too well.

"I wonder if it is true that there are certain people who can tell where any article has been, and what has gone on around it, by simply seeing it or touching it," observed Letty, presently. "One sometimes hears wonderful stories of such things. If there is any truth at their bottom, surely many mysteries might be cleared up."

Agnes shook her head dubiously. "I believe there is some truth in them, Lettice, but I fancy it is an intangible, personal kind of truth; just as we are liable to be attracted or repelled by people of whom we know nothing."

"I see what you mean," mused Lettice. "For instance, with that," and she pointed to the stick, "we know of the doubts there have been and of Maria's fears, so we, looking at it, conjure up a picture of despair and disaster and death."

"Oddly enough, there comes to me only a vision of wickedness and remorse," said Agnes. "But let us leave it."

"Oh, and here's papa!" exclaimed Lettice, looking from the window. "I think I never felt so glad to see him."

On the morning of this same bright day, Charles Carr took advantage of the sunshine to walk to Carstow, whence he took the train to Sladford, his errand to the latter place being to buy another watchmaker's hammer, and hand it, with his apologies, to his friend, Mark Acland. Of the lost hammer no trace could be found. Charles had seen and questioned the man who mended the clock at the works, but the latter assured him he had not carried it away.

Mark Acland was with a surgeon at Sladford, one Mr. Stephenson. Mr. Stephenson united the business of a chemist and druggist to his profession, and all that part of young Acland's time not given to study or to paying visits to patients with his master, was spent behind the counter in the shop, dispensing drugs.

Charles Carr, passing through the streets of Sladford, which the sun was making hot and bright, as elsewhere, after the days of gloomy rain, found him there on this morning, in full charge of the shop, the regular attendant in it being laid up with illness. Acland was a gay-natured, pleasant-mannered young fellow and welcomed Charles with effusion. Greetings over, Charles went straight to the point at once.

"You remember the watchmaker's hammer you lent me so long ago, Mark?"

"Well, yes, I do," admitted Mark, smiling. "To own the truth, I thought you had forgotten it."

"And so I had," replied Charles. "It slipped out of my mind altogether for a time. And now it is not to be found."

"That's a pity," said the young man, "for I had only borrowed it

for you. I got it from a man named Webster, who used to live next door here."

"Of course I shall buy another; and I should like to see Webster and tell him how sorry I am," added Charles. "Where does he live, do you say? Next door?"

"He does not live here at all now. He has gone away; taken to a business ever so far off."

"Dear me, I wish I could have seen him," exclaimed Charles. "Now you speak of the name, I believe it was printed on the handle of the hammer—'Webster'—and the name of the place, 'Sladford.' Yes. I shall write and explain."

"Don't trouble writing to Webster about it," advised Mark. "Buy the new hammer, use it, and then return it with an apology for its long detention, and an explanation of its not being the same article. That will be the best plan. And now, Charlie, what is going on at Dering? Tell me all the news of the dear old place. Don't I often wish I was back there!"

Charles told him all the news he could remember—which was not much, he laughingly said, for there was no especial news to tell. The General was getting better and better at the Court; the Palmers were all right; and the Grales were pretty well. "I think," he added, in conclusion, "that Allan Grale's prolonged absence is telling rather sharply upon the old lady."

"That's it," cried Mark Acland, quickly, "that's what I want to ask you about. Do you know where young Grale is?"

"No, I don't," replied Charles. "He left home suddenly, saying nothing to anybody, I believe, and he did not come back again. That's some months ago."

"Do you know whether there was anything went wrong with him before he left?" was Acland's next question.

"Mark," said Charles, with his simple half-comical gravity, "it is not easy to know the truth about one's neighbours, though it is quite easy to repeat the gossip concerning them."

The young chemist did not seem to notice the implied caution. He had his own special object in view.

"Do you happen to recollect the month? Was it in October?"

Charles reflected for a moment. "Yes," he said, "he went away in October."

Mark Acland had taken up a ledger and was rapidly turning over the leaves. He stopped at one of the pages dated in the month of October, the preceding year. Then he turned the book towards Charles: who saw sundry entries therein, and at the very bottom of the page, on its margin, the letter S.

"What do you think that stands for?" asked Acland.

"What, indeed?" returned Charles. "I cannot tell."

"It stands for 'suicide,'" said the other succinctly. And looked steadily into young Carr's face.

"On that evening," he related, "I was in the shop alone, as I am now. While I was serving some children with pennyworths of liquorice, a gentleman walked in. He was looking so pale and ill that I got rid of the youngsters in a giffy, thinking he must want medical assistance of some kind. Instead of this he asked for a considerable quantity of a certain powerful poison used in photography. Now I can assure you that he was not at all the person for whom I was likely to waive the precautions we should always take before selling such things."

"Then what did you do?" asked Charles.

"Enquired his name and address, and whether he had any references," returned the other, promptly. "And I knew exactly what would happen next. He hesitated, said he was quite a stranger in the place, and could mention no references which would be worth anything. And then, while he looked at me and I at him, I conclude he saw that he would not get served with what he wanted; for he went on to say that he would not take the chemicals after all, as he might not be able to use them until he reached some place where he could settle down. And so, saying he was sorry to have troubled me, he turned and walked out of the shop. After he left, I put that mark 'S' in the ledger, in case I should hear of some tragedy, and might have a piece of evidence worth offering," continued Acland. "I felt absolutely certain that unfortunate applicant intended to make away with himself."

"But what has this to do with young Grale?" questioned Charles.

"I'll tell you. This gentleman's face had seemed familiar to me, and I could not get it out of my mind. It was somehow familiar, and yet not familiar. In the middle of the night I woke up suddenly, and the face flashed into my memory, and I saw, or thought I saw, that it was Allan Grale's."

"Allan Grale's!" echoed Charles.

"I was not sure; I never have been sure; and the more I dwell upon it the less certainty I feel. One minute I say to myself 'It *was* Grale's face, but disguised;' the next minute I say 'No, it was not Grale's, but a face bearing a curious likeness to his.' Anyway, had I heard within twenty-four hours of that evening visit here that young Mr. Grale had destroyed himself, it would have given me no surprise."

"But don't you think it strange that you should not have known Grale out-and-out, if it was he?" questioned Charles.

"Not so strange. It is some years, you know, since I left Dering, and he must have altered a good deal. I have said his face was disguised, but I am not sure of that; it may have been only its own natural alteration."

"Which evening do you say this was, Mark?—what date?"

"I think it was Wednesday, the twenty-first of October; but it may have been Tuesday the twentieth," replied Acland. "Jones; that's my coadjutor in the shop here—or I suppose I ought to say that I am

his, for he is head manager after the master—has rather a careless way of marking his dates. When he begins a fresh page, he always puts down the date and the day of the week, and he does not put another date down on the page at all; so that it sometimes happens the entries on one and the same page may comprise two days' entries, if not three days'. See," added the young man, again turning the ledger to Charles, "he has put down Tuesday, the twentieth of October, at the top here; and at the top of the next page Thursday, the twenty-second. So that it is impossible to say which of the two former evenings it was."

"And you cannot recollect which?"

"Not with certainty. The impression on my mind is that it was the later one—Wednesday."

"It was on the Tuesday that Grale left home—early in the evening," remarked Charles. "And I do not know that anybody has seen him or heard of him from that hour to this."

Mark Acland stooped down and took something from under the counter. "The next morning, I was putting the shop to rights before Jones came, when I found this in the corner of the outer counter," he remarked. "Look at it, Charles."

It was a walking-stick; a common, heavy black staff, its ferule torn and almost broken away from hard usage.

"I think the man left this behind him," he said. "I could not call to mind anybody else who had been in the shop that was likely to do so."

"I must say this stick is not much in Allan Grale's style," cried Charles.

"No, indeed; but the get up of the whole man was not in Grale's style, or I think I should have known him at once. The very face was different; and yet, when once his name came into my mind, I felt half sure it was he. I might have felt more sure, only the idea seemed so very unlikely."

A customer came in at that juncture, and then another; young Acland became very busy, and had no further time to give to gossip. So Charles Carr wished him good-bye, and took his departure.

He went back home by train. And upon reaching Dering station, the first person he saw was Dr. Palmer himself, who had gone there to see a patient off. Eagerly enough, Charles poured into his ear what he had heard from Mark Acland.

"But it is all uncertain at the best, Charles," remarked the Doctor, after listening and musing: "as everything else seems to be that's connected with the departure of Allan Grale. Your friend Acland is not able to decide whether it was Grale who went into the shop and demanded these poisons, or whether it was not. Neither can he give the precise date."

"True, sir. If he ——"

Suddenly Charles felt the Doctor give his arm a sharp grip, which

he understood was meant to enjoin instant silence. Instinctively he glanced round. They were passing the back wall of the station. In this back wall there was set one little window, consisting of two dusky panes, sufficient to allow the officials to reconnoitre the country on that side.

Sufficient also, it now appeared, to allow the public to reconnoitre the interior!

For there, on the narrow foot-path, bending a little to one side, so that the light from within should not strike upon her face, and intently watching, stood the yellow-cloaked woman. Charles, as he softly passed behind her, contrived to throw a glance inside, curiously eager to find out what she could be looking at. He saw the station-master turning over his time-tables; and he saw George Vivian standing at the ink-splashed wooden desk, filling in a telegram form.

"What on earth can that woman expect or want to see?" whispered Charles, after they had passed.

"Who knows?" returned the Doctor. "Perhaps she may be only trying to see the station-master's clock! But there is something queer about her. She's not unlike a detective. Others have thought so, as well as I," he added, recalling what had been said to him by Edgar Vivian. "If she is not that, she's watching somebody or something for purposes of her own."

"But she works as a sempstress," exclaimed Charles.

"Yes, that may be all a part of her plan. But now, Charles, we must return to what immediately concerns us: did Acland say whether this man, whom he saw, looked at all travel-stained?"

They had come to the bend of the road, which would hide the station from their view, and Charles turned to look back at it. George Vivian, having apparently transacted his business, had quitted the office, and was coming leisurely along. The yellow woman was nowhere to be seen.

The first news to greet Dr. Palmer, when they entered his house, was the sad event of that afternoon at Dering: namely, the discovery of Allan Grale's walking-stick by the Black Pool. The Doctor's daughters stood shivering by, as he touched it and examined it.

This stick belonged to Allan; there was no question of that. Whether the other stick, coarse and common, found in the chemist's shop, had also belonged to him, no one could say. It was very strange that both the sticks should have been heard of, so to say, on the same day.

"As matters have come to this pass, the Grales must now be spoken with," observed the Doctor, slowly. "I must be the one to do it, I suppose. Come along, Charles. Mr. Grale may wish to hear you say yourself what you have to say, rather than listen to it second hand."

"Do you mean, sir, that I ought to tell him what Mark Acland said?"

"Certainly. Encompassed with uncertainty though it be, Mr. Grale ought to hear it."

They both went out, into the rich golden light of the calm summer evening. As they walked, with the peaceful beauty of field and woodland stretching far away around them—here and there a soft, white cloud of smoke rising from a cottage chimney to tell of the rest and comfort of harmless homes, it seemed a world apart from sin and sorrow.

And at no point was the scene more peaceful or more fair than when they drew near Moorland House; its long, low, old walls gleaming white amid its solemn cedars and umbrageous elms. The rooks were cawing noisy vespers, amid which the remote monotonous note of the eve-jar, struck the ear but faintly.

"What was that?" asked the Doctor suddenly, with a start.

"I heard nothing but the birds," answered Charles.

"I am sure it was a human voice," said the Doctor. At that moment they turned into the short, broad path leading to the Moorland porch. In front of it stood a carriage—a neat little brougham, which Dr. Palmer knew well. He had occasionally hired it himself in Carstow.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, "there are visitors! It will be difficult to get at Mr. Grale alone, without exciting observation.

But at that instant somebody came out of Moorland House, running hastily past the brougham. It was Susan, the parlour-maid.

In her absorbed haste she almost ran against them. She pulled herself up breathlessly, exclaiming:

"Oh, Dr. Palmer, I was coming for you, sir. The mistress has heard some bad news, and she just gave one scream and fell down in a dead faint."

"Ah, I thought I heard a cry!" responded Dr. Palmer, hurrying forward. Susan ran by his side, Charles following.

"It was all the cook's fault," narrated Susan. "She'd been down in the village, and she'd heard something about poor Mr. Allan. If she had taken a minute to think, she'd have had more sense; but the mistress was the first person she met, just crossing the hall, and she told her what she heard—and Mrs. Grale cried out and fell."

They were on the threshold now. "Who is the visitor, Susan?" asked Dr. Palmer, in a hurried whisper, as he pointed to the brougham.

"Lady Laura Bond, sir."

(To be continued).

THOUGHT-READING AT LADY CLANJAMFRY'S.

I.

COLONEL LYNDHURST and Mabel Barrington had been engaged just twenty minutes by the Cupid-conducted clock on Mrs. Barrington's drawing room mantelpiece, when unfortunately a subject cropped up about which they totally disagreed.

How they came, at such a moment, to hit upon this unlucky topic seems incredible, but it was one that interested them both in a different fashion. They might, with safety and unanimity, have discussed anything else in the world without the slightest risk of falling out, and have reserved the supernatural for conversation after marriage, but the fates willed otherwise. When Colonel Lyndhurst said, "Oh, nonsense! my dear girl," in a voice which Mabel had seldom heard him use before, it was no wonder that she tossed her head—which for the purpose she was obliged to remove from the Colonel's shoulder.

"But I assure you, Frederick," she began; and the Colonel interrupting her, a fierce argument ensued, neither of the lovers, or rather combatants, listening to a single word the other brought forward.

"If we are to differ like this about one of the most sacred, the most important ——"

"Pooh, pooh, Mabel! if you are going to get so excited about a wretched trifle ——"

"I see we are both of the same mind on one point, at all events," said Miss Barrington, haughtily, "that we made a grand mistake in thinking we should ever make each other happy. I hope you will forget the unfortunate incident of this afternoon as quickly as I mean to do, and if any recollection remains it will be satisfaction that we discovered an incompatibility of temper in time. Good morning, Colonel Lyndhurst!"

"But, my dear Mabel, are you positively going to sacrifice ——"

"Good morning, Colonel Lyndhurst." Miss Barrington had majestically rung the bell, and said, "Front door, James," to the footman as coolly as if she had been dismissing a charity-collector. There was nothing for it but to leave her—which the poor Colonel did in an altogether humiliated fashion. He had not even his hat to shelter himself with, for having come with a purpose, he had intentionally and significantly deposited it in the hall, on hearing that Mrs. Barrington had gone down to Harrow Speeches, but Miss Barrington was at home and would receive him. After vainly casting his eyes round the drawing-room and dashing wildly into one or two likely corners, he remembered this trifling but suggestive circumstance, and followed James down stairs as described.

Bang! went the hall-door. James might have been suffering

agonies of unassuaged pique from the way he slammed it, but in reality he only felt that his five o'clock toast was cooling below. Then the house was quiet, and Mabel Barrington flung herself on the sofa.

"How can he say there is nothing in it?" she sobbed. "Why, I've felt it over and over again, and this very day I was just thinking about him, when the door opened and in he came!"

A proof of the disputed topic of thought-reading which might have convinced Colonel Lyndhurst more than any better argument had she only thought of mentioning it before.

The bell rang, and Mabel started up. Could it be her mother returning? No, it was Frederick Lyndhurst's voice once more in parley at the door; he must be coming back to retract all he had said against her favourite hobby; and, hastily brushing aside her tears, she determined that he should find her unmoved though inwardly not disinclined for reconciliation.

But alas, the front door slammed once again; through the open windows she heard the footsteps she had learnt to know in the last few weeks, hurriedly passing down the street; and she was aware that now there was to be no reconciliation between her lover and herself.

The fact was that the Colonel, in passing the hatstand in Mrs. Barrington's hall, in place of his own glossy hat had seized a large and well-worn beaver, the property of the late Mr. Barrington, which his widow always kept en evidence as a precautionary measure against vagabonds of all sorts; and it was not till he was half way to the club, and James had contentedly regained his tea-tray, that the hapless lover discovered his mistake. It was mortifying to be obliged to return, but it was impossible to proceed in the head-gear of the late Mr. Barrington, who had prided himself on a supposed likeness to John Bright and had dressed in support of it. Hence Colonel Lyndhurst's second appearance at the door, his colloquy with James, and his retreating footsteps. The household in Hans Place were to know him no more.

II.

"WHATEVER is the matter with Mabel?" asked Tom Barrington, the next time he came up from Aldershot, and found himself alone with his mother. "I never saw a girl so 'down' in my life. Hasn't the affair with Lyndhurst come to anything?"

"I don't know," sighed Mrs. Barrington, weakly. "He was here the day I went down to Harrow with the Simplesons. Such a dull day we had of it, Tom! And I had to sit with my back to the horses all the way, for neither Mrs. Simpleson nor her sister can do so. And they were so dreadfully silly about their boys! I wished I had never consented to go at all, just to be bored to death with conversation about Algy and Alfy, and dragged up a hill like the side of a house, because of the horses ——"

"Well, about Lyndhurst?" growled Tom, interrupting his mother.

"Ah, to be sure. Well, he came and called—at least so James said; and he saw Miss Barrington, and then he went away and took your poor father's hat instead of his own, and had to return and change it. But Mabel had a bad headache when I came in, and told me nothing."

"Took that old hat, did he? That looks bad—must have looked bad, I mean. Do you think she refused him?"

"My dear boy, how can I tell? You and Mabel tell me so little about your affairs, I sometimes feel inclined to give up London life altogether, and set up in some quiet little village, where at least I can be of use to some poor old woman. I should be doing a little good then at all events."

This was a favourite threat of Mrs. Barrington's when annoyed.

"Poor dear mother! I'm sure you're the life and soul of a dozen old women as it is, without going to a country village to look for them. Now, what is it? I know you are vexed about something."

"Only this troublesome affair of Mabel's," admitted the lady, who liked to be petted and pitied by her handsome son: "and all sorts of little worries. Why, that sister of Mrs. Simpleson's asked me how long Mabel had been out, and if I knew Lady Clanjamfry? And then when I said 'yes,' she asked if we were going to the soirée on the 27th? I was obliged to say we hadn't got our card yet; at which she pretended to be quite concerned, though she managed to mention that it was only for *intimate* friends."

"Poor mother! Point her out to me the next time we meet at an evening party, and I'll go for her skirts in my spurs!"

"But, Tom, suppose Lady Clanjamfry doesn't ask us?"

"We'll dynamite Clanjamfry House just as Mrs. Simpleson's carriage stops the way! Well, goodbye mother; I'm dining with Chambers at the club, and perhaps I shall be able to bring you home news of the Colonel—see you at breakfast. Goodbye."

III.

"LYNDHURST'S gone off to Paris," said Captain Tom Barrington, next morning, laying down the *Times* unconcernedly, as if he had just read the news in its pages, and glancing across at his sister.

"Ah! here it is, at last," cried Mrs. Barrington, waving an envelope triumphantly behind the tea-urn.

"What, from him?" Mabel ejaculated, off her guard. "I mean, at least, of course, from her?" seeing Tom's eyes curiously regarding her.

"Lady Clanjamfry's invitation," continued her mother, heedless of her daughter's slip. "'*Mrs. and Miss Barrington, Thursday, 27th July,* 10 *o'clock. Thought reading!*' How delightful!"

"Ugh!" shuddered Tom, resuming the *Times*, but still covering his sister's face from behind it. "Don't ask me, do they? that's all

right. It's all humbug, you know; a put-up thing; I've seen it at lots of places. Just an excuse for fellows to stand, holding girls' hands ——"

"Tom!" said his mother, much scandalized, "I'm sure you're mistaken. Lady Clanjamfry would never permit such a thing. Besides, this is not to be an amateur séance, there is a regular experimentalist, a Herr Van Boschmann, who never fails, the Simplesons declare!"

"Never fails to take in the Simplesons, I daresay! Are you as infatuated about this nonsense as the rest, Mabel?"

"I? Oh, I don't know! That is, I think it is very interesting. There must be something in it."

"A very new and original opinion, my dear! I've no doubt there is, and Van der Bosch, or whatever his name is, thinks so too. Did I tell you that your young friend Lyndhurst had gone off to Paris at a moment's notice, and public opinion is divided between the idea of an elopement in high life or an appointment to head a forlorn hope at Tonquin?"

"Who told you?" Mabel continued to drink tea out of a cup she had already finished, and kept her eyes resolutely fixed on the rosebud at the bottom of it.

"I met Curzon last night, and he was full of it. Said he met Lyndhurst on Tuesday in Sloane Street in the most ridiculous hat, and he dashed past him in the wildest way—went off that very evening to Paris, cutting all his engagements. Curzon said it was just as well he did go, for no one could possibly have known him in such a tile!"

Mabel said nothing, but helped herself to butter. "Plucky girl!" thought Tom; "she won't show if it hurts. I like her for that!"

"You would go, Tom dear, wouldn't you, if I could get another card?" asked Mrs. Barrington, persuasively. "It would be so much nicer for Mabel and me if we had you with us—wouldn't it Mabel?"

"You had better take Tom in my place, mamma." Mabel jumped up and went hastily to the window under pretence of giving her canary a lump of sugar, but her hand shook so that it dropped on the floor of the cage, Tom observed. "I don't think I care much about it."

"Not care? Why a week ago your heart was set upon this thought-reading, and we were moving heaven and earth for the invitation. What has happened to you, Mabel?"

"Nothing; only I suppose a week ago I had very little chance of going, so I longed for it. Now that it is within my reach I don't care a bit about it," the girl answered, wearily. "It seems to me that is always the way; one doesn't know the value of anything unless it is unattainable."

She fidgeted about the room for an instant or two and then made her escape upstairs, leaving her mother speechless with bewilderment

and Tom whistling the "Mulligan Guards" under his breath. It was the only tune Tom could whistle, and he always did it when he was perplexed, or at a loss, and a great deal on Sundays.

"Poor Mabel!" he ruminated. "Had a tiff with Lyndhurst, of course, and sent him off in a huff. Now, she wants him back again. Wonder what it was all about? They seemed to be getting along bravely when I last saw them together. I shouldn't wonder if it was some of this supernatural, electro-biologising business has put his back up; I know he hates it like poison. It sent one of his sisters half off her head, and Mabel, who used to be so hot about it, spoke quite venomously just now, as if she couldn't bear to hear it mentioned. I must try and get it all straight for them. By-the-bye it would be fun if Van der Bosch, the wizard, turned out to be that rascally little Jew we kicked out of Colchester with his marked cards in his pocket. He used to profess some such occult arts, in bland and unbending moments in the small hours of the morning."

IV.

On the afternoon of the 27th of July, three weeks after the foregoing occurrences, and the day of Lady Clanjamfry's soirée, Captain Barrington was walking up Piccadilly with his friend Lord Curzon.

"You're coming to my aunt's affair to-night, aren't you? They are awfully short of men, and she told me to go out and catch anybody and everybody and make them come. You see it has got about that they are going to have this German thought-reader fellow, and most of the men think it all rot and have declined—and I don't blame them. But you're such a good-natured fellow, you won't refuse?"

"I don't know Lady Clanjamfry," Tom replied. "Look! there's Lyndhurst; he's much more your man. Didn't know he was home! Rush after him now, and make him go to-night—only don't you tell him about the thought-reading, or you'll never get him."

"Thanks! All right, I will—didn't know he was home, either. Come if you can, Barrington," and nodding to him hastily Lord Curzon hastened along Albemarle Street after the Colonel's retreating figure.

"You must come, Lyndhurst! You are one of my aunt's favourite young men, and I'm sent out like Noah's dove to bring you in. You would have had a card, of course, if you hadn't disappeared in that unaccountable manner. Now that you've come back, clothed ——"

"What do you mean?" asked the Colonel.

"Why you certainly didn't look in your right mind the last time I saw you in Sloane Street, a month ago. You had on a hat that Noah himself might have envied ——"

"I'll come to Lady Clanjamfry's with pleasure," Lyndhurst interrupted, hastily, desirous of letting by-gones be by-gones. "Ah! by the way, is Barrington going? I saw him with you just now."

"Says he doesn't know my aunt. I pressed him, but couldn't get him to promise," at which Colonel Lyndhurst looked exceedingly relieved, and promising to call for his companion at half-past ten o'clock, he and Lord Curzon went their separate ways.

Meanwhile Tom Barrington had turned in at a well-known library and theatrical agency, and re-emerged in a short time with a card in his hand which bore an address that he constantly perused as he walked eastward. Arrived at Piccadilly Circus, he crossed the road and dived into a narrow street leading to Golden Square, and was consequently lost to the gaze of the fashionable world.

V.

THE thought-reader at Lady Clanjamfry's soirée was a little foreign faced Jew, brown and wiry as a Frenchman, without a single Teutonic trait to correspond with his German name. He stood in the centre of a red carpeted daïs, which his hostess had erected at one end of her big drawing-room and in front of the boudoir door; the boudoir serving as a green-room.

Lady Clanjamfry has, as everyone knows, a most effusive manner, which enables her to fill up what might otherwise prove awkward pauses, when, as often happens, she fails to identify people by their right names. She has a very large circle, and is perpetually exercising some new hobby round it. To-night she has swooped upon a luminary of the Church and an eminent physician, and has dragged them to two arm-chairs behind the experimentalist on the daïs.

"We must have men of note, you know; one accustomed to direct the souls and the other the bodies of his fellow-creatures. Now what we want to complete the chain is, the Professor says, a man of mind, of intellect; also, if possible, a soldier, a commanding nature. Ah, Colonel Lyndhurst, is that you? You are the very man we want to make our little experiment complete! You must positively oblige me by joining those two gentlemen on the platform as Herr Von Boschmann's committee. We have none of us forgotten your wonderfully clever book on—on—the habits of the Afghans, wasn't it? I know it enthralled me!"

And poor Lyndhurst, before he could assert either his detestation of all forms of occult power or the real topic of his book, found himself on the daïs too, alongside of the Clerical Celebrity and the Eminent Physician, who glared ferociously at him as the acknowledged "man of intellect."

"For goodness sake take my place, Curzon," he expostulated. "I would not be here of my own will for anything you could give me!" But Curzon only shook his head, and with an innocent air asked if he looked like a 'man with a mind?' After which he slipped into a seat near his aunt, and the business of the soirée began.

"You will, please, tie this handkerchief tightly about my face and

cover the eyes, leaving the nose exposed to the air," said the Professor to the clerical celebrity.

The clerical celebrity tried to do as he was desired, but in his anxiety he tied a granny knot; whereupon the eminent physician seized the bandage and wielded it with professional ability. Then Herr Von Boschmann requested Colonel Lyndhurst to conduct him to the front of the platform, and still holding his hand to attach himself to the eminent physician, who in his turn was to clasp the fingers of the clerical celebrity, though the latter in consequence of the slip with the 'Granny,' was reduced to a position of minor importance and was evidently pondering whether such an exhibition were in keeping with his figure and his canonry. So there stood the four black figures against the startling relief of Lady Clanjamfry's cream coloured boudoir-door; and very foolish they must look, Lyndhurst felt sure, and into his mind darted a feeling of relief that Tom Barrington did not know Lord Curzon's aunt. He stared straight in front of him and wondered how much longer this would last, when the Professor in broken English, rendered strangely nasal by the successful bandageing, announced that the chain of influencing power was still incomplete; that another element was still necessary to make sufficient impression upon him to perform any successful experiments.

"What we want is the female power, the great lever of the universe," explained the Professor, with a smile intended to be fascinating, though somewhat marred by the handkerchief. "Have we here a young lady, who will so far lay aside her own convenience, as to mount our platform and give us her assistance? Is there here a young and beautiful lady of what I would describe as the auburn or purely English type, with fair complexion, hazel eyes, broad forehead and wavy chestnut hair?"

Lyndhurst started involuntarily; it was an obvious description of Mabel Barrington. Could the thought-reader have looked into his mind as he thought of Tom and hoped Mabel would never hear of his appearance on Lady Clanjamfry's platform?

"This is the sort of influence I desire to add to my chain of con centrated power," continued the Professor. "Will any lady who corresponds with the description be so very kind as to volunteer?"

Whether the description given by the professor did not altogether accord with the canons of feminine beauty then in vogue, or whether the ladies were shy, does not appear, but it is certain that no ladies seemed inclined to move. The clerical celebrity, anxious to recover his lost prestige, signalled hopefully to an ample lady in black lace in the second row, and even attempted to cajole her as "my dear," but without effect.

"Will no one come to our aid and forward the interesting experiments of the evening?" asked Von Boschmann again. "There is, I think, in the left-hand corner of the room, a young lady such as we require for our purpose. She is dressed in a white dress with golden

stars, and has a golden star in the front of her hair. Can she be persuaded to join us, for the sake of promoting the necessary influence?"

Lyndhurst's eyes darted to the corner indicated. In spite of the great length of the drawing-room, which is the special glory of Clanjamfry House, he in an instant discovered Mabel, seated beside her mother, and dressed exactly as the Professor had described, in the brand new toilette which Mrs. Barrington had insisted upon providing even at the fag-end of the season, the details of which had even interested Tom, little as he was generally given to investigating ladies' attire.

"You won't refuse! You can't refuse, dear Miss Barrington! Just consider how wonderful it all is, and how you alone are able to make it go off properly! Why, he actually described you most accurately in spite of the bandage. I know you won't refuse to help us." In short Lady Clanjamfry would take no denial.

"I don't like it," said Mabel, faintly.

"It isn't as if it were in public," Lady Clanjamfry assured her. "We are only a few friends met together for this curious investigation, and in my drawing-room ——"

"Nothing can happen but what is pleasant and proper," asserted Mabel's mamma, who was dying for her daughter to distinguish herself. "Why, Mabel, you, who are so interested in these things and are such a capital medium! Don't keep Lady Clanjamfry waiting, but go and do anything you can to help."

Lord Curzon gave her his arm, there was a faint murmur of applause from the people who were tired of waiting for a start, and Mabel Barrington and Frederick Lyndhurst once more stood opposite each other, with Professor Von Boschmann like a blindfolded cupid between them.

"Ah! this is all right at last!" said the latter.

Lyndhurst had never dared to meet Mabel's eyes, but as the Professor requested her to remove her long white glove and familiarly seized her bare hand, he could not repress a gesture of disgust and a swift glance in her direction. Her face was deadly pale, and the long kid glove was torn across the palm.

"We are now fully prepared for any test you may wish to propose," announced Von Boschmann. "I will ask these two gentlemen," bowing in the direction of the cleric and the physician, with as much accuracy as the bandage permitted, "to accompany me to the green-room, while Miss Barrington and Colonel Lyndhurst arrange the form which the experiment is to take, and concentrate their minds upon it so as to offer every facility to the accomplishment of our purpose."

But how was it possible for either Lyndhurst or Mabel to concentrate their minds upon Lady Clanjamfry's carriage umbrella—which Lord Curzon gravely suspended to the centre chandelier, and which the united company designed the Professor to remove—when they stood not three yards apart from each other, in the centre of the red daïs, and recollected how and why they had last parted?

Perhaps this was why the success of the experiment seemed uncertain when, on recalling the Professor from the boudoir, he was once more placed between them, and clasping a hand of each pressed it to his temples.

"Here are conflicting sensations; you are not of the same mind," the operator said sternly. "I will ask Miss Barrington to sit down," ("There's really something in it," whispered the hostess, "for you observe he's got the girl's name, and I'm sure he didn't know it!") "and beg Colonel Lyndhurst to concentrate all his attention on the subject in hand."

A start, a plunge forward on the part of the Professor, a thrill of expectation all through the drawing-room; Colonel Lyndhurst's arm is almost dislocated as his companion dashes off under a sudden inspiration.

But it is not towards the chandelier with the Damocles umbrella that Von Boschmann springs. It is to the distant chair which, the clerical celebrity having vacated, Mabel has appropriated, as far from the scene of action as is compatible with politeness to her hostess. Flinging himself at her feet Von Boschmann pours forth a torrent of words which fortunately are indistinguishable to the majority of the audience, though "Forgive me," "I love you, Mabel," "Life is nothing to me without you," are not to be mistaken; while the gestures of the excited experimentalist denote the most extravagant form of passionate entreaty.

Lady Clanjamfry sprang from her chair, and Mrs. Barrington did the same; there was a rush at the drawing-room door of the people who had quietly remained in the tea-room and on the stairs, and who suddenly became aware that something exceedingly interesting was a-foot within; Colonel Lyndhurst tore his hand from the thought-reader's brow, and the German rose to his feet with a smile and a bow.

"Am I not right? Have I not performed your thought, read your meaning correctly?" he asked, with an air of suppressed triumph.

"Good heavens, no!" thundered Lyndhurst, seizing the unhappy Professor by the collar, and shaking him violently. "How do you dare insult a lady in this manner? I will break every bone in your wretched little ——"

Lady Clanjamfry, Mrs. Barrington, and Lord Curzon were all on the platform now. The lady of the house had her hand upon the infuriated Colonel's arm, Lord Curzon had rescued the trembling and spluttering foreigner, Mrs. Barrington had flown to her daughter; the clerical celebrity and the eminent physician had, with great presence of mind, interposed their portly persons between the audience and the group on the platform.

"But he shall give me satisfaction," vociferated the Professor, though fortunately the bandage having fallen down over his mouth in the struggle, his expletives were not audible to the rest of the room.

"He has made me to fall upon my knees to this young lady, and offer her a declaration of affection, and now he denies the influence, and would shake the life out of me as well! *Himmel und Erde!* I will have satisfaction for this!"

The situation was so strained that the tension seemed almost unbearable.

"Dear Herr Professor," said Mabel, coming forward, holding out her hand, and with her soft, low voice perceptibly trembling, "I must ask you to forgive Colonel Lyndhurst and overlook his excitable temper. I think he has been quite overcome by the extraordinary exercise of your gift, for you must know"—here she looked bravely and steadily at the astonished Colonel—"he and I are just engaged, and perhaps we are both a little upset to find you know all about it! Isn't that so, Frederick?"

"Herr Von Boschmann will now proceed to the original test of the evening," called out Lady Clanjamfry. And accordingly Von Boschmann, having resumed his bandage, was triumphantly conducted, by means of the clerical celebrity's white fingers on his forehead, to the centre chandelier, whence, amidst ringing cheers, he detached the carriage umbrella.

"And now I am sure we are all ready for supper," said her ladyship. And if it occurred to anybody that a carriage-umbrella suspended in the middle of an evening party of the highest rank, might well have attracted the notice of the Professor during the interval of uncovered eyes which followed his first attempt, and might have possibly influenced the accuracy of his movements, they were either too polite or too hungry to mention it.

Miss Barrington's engagement was announced in the *Morning Post* two days afterwards, and Lyndhurst is still in so soft and yielding a mood that he allows Mabel to maintain that there is a "great deal in it," without opposition.

Herr Von Boschmann, after his début in Lady Clanjamfry's drawing-room, of which varied accounts got about, but which all combined in proclaiming "eminently successful," is sure to have a great run among the Bayswater and South Kensington salons in the half-season. Nobody would venture to doubt his great gift now, though some have whispered that the German's pronunciation becomes curiously nasal when he is excited, and might almost be taken for pure Yankee. Tom Barrington, though he was not at Lady Clanjamfry's famous party, could perhaps tell as much about him as anybody, but he is delighted at his sister's engagement and says no word. Some day, if Mabel gets too uppish, and insists upon the importance of occult influences, he will perhaps give his brother-in-law a hint which may restore the balance of power.

G. B. Stuart.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

THERE was a busy stir, one October day in the year 1772, in the parsonage house of the little town of Ottery St. Mary, in South Devon, where dwelt the clergyman of the parish and the master of the Grammar School, the two offices being united in the person of one and the same gentleman. The maid-servants scurried hither and thither, with rustling skirts and faces full of meaning; the master of the house sat in the study, trying to write next Sunday's sermon, but, in reality, listening anxiously for any sound that might come from upstairs, where rapid feet seemed moving frequently.

But where was the wife, mother and mistress? She who, many years ago now, had entered the young widower's house—a house already resounding with the prattle of three children—at once to reign over all, and minister to all: she to whom would come, alike, the Vicar to know the whereabouts of a truant book in his study, and the smallest schoolboy in the Grammar School to cure a cut finger. She was forced, for a while this autumn morning, to stay those willing feet, which were always so ready, at every call, to run up and down the vicarage stairs to bring help or comfort, for she had just given birth to her tenth child. There had gone a cry through the Devonshire vicarage, the first earthly utterance of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

The little fellow soon began to grow into the bright, intelligent toy of his parents and wilder brothers and sisters; and then into something more than a toy: a young spirit gazing out into the world with eager, enquiring eyes, that were singularly quick to catch new impressions, and with a mind into which those impressions slid rapidly, to bring forth still more rapidly flower and fruit. These Coleridges were a race, all of them, with more than a spark of wit in them, and it was in no dull, drowsy home that the boy gathered up his earliest ideas of life and things in general.

His father died when little Samuel was seven, and the boy, with the rest of the children who were not as yet able to shift for themselves, were left to the sole care and guardianship of Mrs. Coleridge, his mother. She seems to have been a woman quite equal to such a charge; a woman who could fill the place of both parents at once better than most of her sex. She had much feminine sympathetic tenderness in her nature, but, at the same time, she possessed a cool, shrewd, practical common-sense, which was almost man-like in its strength. She did not pet and spoil her youngest born, great though was always her love for him and pride in him. She ruled him with a firm, yet gentle hand, and sent him to school early.

At ten years old Samuel Taylor Coleridge was sent to Christ's

Hospital, and became a bluecoat scholar. There he remained for several years, his mind unfolding in the direction which was natural to it. He did not distinguish himself especially by his classical proficiency, but he showed he was a lad of mark in ways not so common among boys at public schools. He wrote much original composition, delighting especially in flights into poetry, and he read a vast number of books of all kinds. He is said to have carried on, indeed, quite a book-trade as a school-boy. He was incessantly picking up odd volumes on bookstalls, and going through intricate negotiations with his school comrades with regard to the sale, and purchase, and exchange of books.

From those school days at Christ's Hospital dates a friendship which was to be one of the brightest flowers in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's life; this was his friendship with Charles Lamb. We can picture to ourselves what sort of a boy's friendship that must have been. What rare and novel games in the playground; what fireworks of fun flashing from bed to bed after the candles were put out in the dormitory; what evil days for dull, heavy boys when the pair took it into their heads to go forth on a grand campaign of mischief. Then, in more thoughtful moments, what sharing of bright, rainbow dreams of the future; what high aspirations whispered by each to each; what noble, earnest resolves made and kept the longer because they were made and kept together.

At nineteen young Coleridge became an undergraduate at Jesus College, Cambridge. There was a certain amount of indolence in his character, and this prevented his gaining any very brilliant honours at the University. His mind was far more occupied with the leading questions of his day, than it was with dead languages and classical literature. His was a vigorous, energetic intellect, which threw itself into the struggles and heart-searchings and difficulties of the times in which he lived with vivid force and intensity, but possessed scanty ambition in the direction of the learning of the schools: so that, as far as this was concerned, he yielded to the native physical indolence of which we have spoken above. In his rooms at college, Homer and Thucydides were thrust aside to make way for recent publications which told of the state of men's minds in Europe, of rising schools of philosophy, of new, wild dreams of liberty and equality. When his friends came to spend the evening with him, he repeated to them no elegant Latin verses, but a pamphlet written by Edmund Burke, which he had learned by heart in the course of a single morning.

The mind of young Coleridge at this period was indeed so incessantly floating away upon a sea of grand, speculative thought that it became far too careless with regard to everyday temporal matters around him; and of this, when he had been about a year at Cambridge, he received a most convincing and uncomfortable proof.

One morning the young undergraduate found lying on his breakfast-table, a bill to the amount of £100, from one of the leading

upholsterers of the University city. He stared at first in blank amazement, and hurried off to the man's shop with words of angry denial on his lips. The tradesman was polite but firm. Mr. Samuel Taylor Coleridge certainly did owe him that sum; there was no mistake, no doubt about it; he brought forward his book as a proof. Then slowly there dawned on the unlucky youth's mind the recollection of the fact that, on his first arrival at Cambridge, this upholsterer had written to him and asked him whether he should furnish his rooms for him. He had given an answer in the affirmative, and since then had never thought again of the matter, or even taken the trouble to wonder how the chairs and tables came into his apartments.

This debt was a real blow to young Coleridge. Money was not too plentiful in the family, and he knew that his widowed mother had strained every nerve to meet the expense of sending him to college. He fell into a state of dreary despondency; a condition which was increased, just at this time, by a Miss Mary Evans, a young lady for whom he had conceived a violent boy's love: a sentiment which just then, he declared, and probably believed, would last contemporaneously with his own life. A feeling of grand, hopeless desperation, therefore, for a while, completely enveloped the young poet. What with his debts, and what with his unlucky love, his great wish now was that his own identity should be completely lost both for himself and others. Samuel Taylor Coleridge should cease to be. But the question was how could this be done most effectually?

He did not wish to commit suicide: that would be too much of a good thing for even his tragic misery; but he must find some other manner of vanishing into oblivion.

Accordingly his fertile, imaginative brain set about considering what he could do to carry out his purpose. Just when he was in the midst of this problem, he happened to meet a recruiting sergeant passing down the street of a country town, and busily engaged in his duties. This sight seemed to young Coleridge to bring exactly the opportunity he wanted. He enlisted, under the name of Silas Titus Cumberbatch—thus retaining his own initials—into a foot regiment of the line as a private soldier. There was nothing very new in the idea, to be sure; many heroes and non-heroes, both in and out of novels, had done such a thing before him; and even a young poet, when at once in debt and in love, is only a man after all.

For some months he remained in the regiment, going through all the common experiences of a private soldier's life in those days, when a private soldier's life was decidedly not exactly a record of "the sublime and beautiful," which he read about in the pages of his idol, Edmund Burke. His knowledge of human nature was, doubtless, enlarged and enriched, but he had probably had more than enough of his escapade before it was over. The story ended in

most unromantic fashion. Young Coleridge was discovered by his friends, his debts were paid by his relations, Mary Evans ceased to be a divinity in his fancy and became an exceedingly ordinary young woman, who wrought hideous figures in worsted-work, and played a tune or two indifferently on the harpsichord: and he went back to Cambridge and recommenced his undergraduate's life there.

Coleridge had been intended, since boyhood, for the Church. His mother had wished it, and his own inclinations had turned that way. At about this period, however, there occurred a change in his religious views which rendered it impossible for him conscientiously to take holy orders. He had become unfortunately tainted with the doctrines of Unitarianism; so he gave up all thoughts of the Church as a profession, and resolved to try to make a living out of literature. His genius was beginning to wake up, and he was growing to understand something of its power and breadth and height. It may be as well to say here that Unitarianism did not remain Samuel Taylor Coleridge's creed for many years; he returned to the doctrines of the Church of England, and became an earnest, if sometimes erring, yet faithful follower of her teaching, and observer of her forms. We may deplore the vacillation of such a man as Coleridge in so grave a matter as his religious opinions, yet of one thing we may be certain: he was always sincere.

But to return to young Coleridge at Cambridge, when he determined to give up the calling of a clergyman.

Coleridge left the university without bearing away with him any laurels in the shape of honours that he had gained there. He was much attracted by the tone of some lectures which Robert Southey, as yet as much to fame unknown as himself, was delivering at Oxford. He went thither, and was introduced to him by some mutual acquaintance, and the two became, from that time forward, close friends. There were many notes of sympathetic harmony between them. They were both poets, the natures of both were innately noble and generous, they were both full of beautiful but impossible dreams concerning freedom and the improvement of the human race.

Both Southey and Coleridge went to Bristol, where they found and became intimate with a young man called Lovell, who held much the same grand, erratic opinions as themselves. The three, together, formed a project for emigrating to America, colonising land on the Susquehanna, and becoming the founders of a glorious new Republic.

While they were waiting in Bristol to mature and carry out the plan, which was full of splendid golden dreams for the future, but sadly in want of a little solid capital in the present, the three young men, having not much else to do, employed their time in falling in love. Matrons would be needed to strike the key-note of society in the new Republic, and they could not do better than set about providing themselves with these necessaries at once. There were three Misses Fricker with whom they had happened to fall in, and who

were all women of some degree of attraction both in mind and person. One was an actress in the Bristol theatre, one a schoolmistress, and one a milliner. These three became respectively Mrs. Lovell, Mrs. Southey, and Mrs. Coleridge. The milliner was Coleridge's wife.

Coleridge's choice was probably made somewhat in a hurry. Had he waited a little longer and reflected a little more on the subject of selecting a life's companion, he would very likely have found and made his own a woman of more culture and refinement than the Bristol milliner. Yet still the union was, on the whole, a happy one. Sarah was endowed with sweetness and tenderness and with a fair share of natural wit and intelligence: and she loved her poet faithfully to the end, though, for many years, circumstances compelled them to live entirely separate. Coleridge certainly never had any very high opinion of female intellect, and perhaps this arose from his having a woman of not much education for a wife.

The scheme for emigration melted into thin air from mere want of funds; Coleridge and Southey having quite enough to do to support themselves and their young wives, let alone talking of paying their passage to America. A kindly Bristol bookseller, who was also a man of literary discernment, and who saw the dawn of genius in the two young men, gave them sufficient work to keep the pot boiling. This bookseller's name was Joseph Cottle. He paid Coleridge thirty guineas for a volume of poems, a sum which was considered quite a mine of wealth by husband and wife. He also helped him to start a periodical, which, however, had to be given up in a few months, because it did not pay its own expenses.

Young Mr. and Mrs. Coleridge first lived in a cottage at Clevedon, which they rented for £5 a year, and which was so scantily provided with household goods that, on the very evening of their arrival there, Coleridge wrote to Southey asking him to send him from Bristol, as quickly as he could, a kettle and a toasting-fork, together with many other indispensable articles. As we speak the well-loved and honoured names of our two great poets, there is something half touching, half ludicrous in the thought of their means being so small that such communications needed to pass between them; and we wonder a little what Mrs. Coleridge and Mrs. Southey were about, that they, instead of their husbands, did not attend to such matters. Yet still, on the other hand, this list of articles wanted in the Clevedon cottage, suggests a pretty thought of the picnic-like sort of life the young pair must have led in their earliest married days. What laughter there must have been over strange makeshifts, what wit must have leapt from the lips of the poet, what graceful, winsome perplexities on the part of the bride housekeeper!

Coleridge walked into Bristol daily from Clevedon, there to find any employment Joseph Cottle could give him. After a while he grew tired of this, and then the young couple gave up the cottage to inhabit apartments in Bristol. They did not remain in these very long; the

poet loved best a country life; he had a great friend in Mr. Poole, who lived at the village of Nether Stowey, in Somersetshire, and Mr. and Mrs. Coleridge soon migrated to another cottage there. It was a little larger than the one at Clevedon, but still no palace.

And now a picture in Coleridge's life rises up before us; a picture which shows us how the star of fame first dawned for him; and a picture which reveals to us, too, the commencement of one of the highest and dearest friendships of his life. We will pause to gaze at it for a moment.

In the cottage garden, where the summer moonlight is playing softly on the flowers, two gentlemen and two ladies are sitting. The mistress of the house is bending tenderly over a tiny garment, upon which her skilful fingers are busy, creating pretty wonders out of lace and lawn; she sits somewhat apart from the others, and does not seem to heed much their talk, bright and beautiful talk though it is. The things spoken of between her husband and his friends are things too high for Sarah Coleridge. And besides, how can she listen now to any talk in the world except the talk of her own thoughts, when she, the young expectant mother, is preparing garments for her coming child? Her lips are silent, her eyes do not even turn towards her companions, but smiles often play round her mouth.

It is an inspired face; a face all fire; yet a face with shadows often flitting over it, the face of the man who is the greatest talker of the other three. He talks as if he were so rich in words he hardly knew which to choose first, enlarging on every subject, and turning it inside out with lightning-like rapidity. The other man, with those deep, earnest, wondrous eyes and that brow which looks like the very sanctuary of thought, speaks less; yet when he does speak his soul seems to make every sentence like a bar of music on an organ, there is so much that is sweet and fair in the simple language. The lady sitting between them says less than either of them; but her whole face is talking, even when her lips are closed, as she glances from one to the other with bright, keenly-interested looks; and now and then she puts in a word which fits exactly into its place in the conversation, and makes a listener feel that it would have been incomplete without it. She is no beauty, yet hers is a sympathetic face, hers is an unwonted play of changeful expression, and often those who watch her say, "How charming," as they gaze. No wonder these three are such congenial companions, for they are Coleridge and his newly-made friends, William Wordsworth and his sweet second self, his sister Dorothy.

The talk this evening is of a projected walking tour into North Devon, when they will visit Lynton; and Coleridge is giving, by hearsay, vivid word pictures of the Devon coast, with all its romance of rock and tiny sheltered bays, fit dressing-rooms for the sea nymphs. But the worst part of the matter is that none of the party can raise enough money to pay even one night's tavern bill. Then Coleridge

cries out that he will write a poem that shall pay the expenses of the whole trio, and thereupon "The Ancient Mariner" is written, and Coleridge's fame as a poet is at once established.

After a time Coleridge removed from Somersetshire, and went to live at Keswick. This change of abode was, no doubt, partly due to a wish to be near Wordsworth and Southey, who had both settled in the north of England. The first years here were probably the happiest years of his life. He had around him a true poet's world of lake and mountain, in which he delighted, and his children were growing up at his side: his son, of whom he predicted great things, though probably, if he had lived, he would have turned out, like most famous men's sons, only half a success; and his daughter, Sarah, a delicate, brilliant, ethereal creature, into whose woman's nature were woven several threads of her father's genius. She became an authoress in after life, and married her cousin, the Rev. Henry Coleridge.

This noontide of Coleridge's story was not, however, to remain long unclouded. He was seized with a violent rheumatic attack, in which he suffered extremely. He got better, but gnawing, wearing pain still hung about him in every limb. In common with many men and women of genius, he had an irritability of nerves, which made physical suffering especially hard for him to bear. He began to take opium to deaden the bodily agony, and continued the practice until it became a fixed habit that held him in slavish chains.

For several years Coleridge remained under that thraldom, which weighed on body and spirit alike; but, at length, the nobler part of his manhood rebelled against it, and he resolved to free himself, cost what it might. He left his home and his family, and went to reside with a Mr. Gillman, at Highgate Grove. With continuous, and painful, and almost gigantic effort, he broke from the bondage that held him and had disgraced his genius and his character, and the evil habit was completely given up; a most heroic victory gained by the man and the Christian.

It was during the latter years of his life that Coleridge especially developed his talent as a talker, and it was from conversations with him at this period that the "Table Talk" was gathered. Perhaps it was his extreme eloquence and readiness with his tongue that made Coleridge, great genius though he was, write so comparatively little poetry. Beautiful as is the legacy which he has bequeathed to posterity, we cannot but feel that there was much more that was beautiful in the man which never found its way on to paper at all.

Coleridge died in 1834, leaving a glorious name to be added to the roll-call of England's greatest and best-loved children.

ALICE KING.

CHRISTOBEL.

By Joyce Darrell, Author of "The Sapphire Cross."

PART THE SECOND.

I.

WITHIN a few hours of Miss Millicent's death, Sir Edward had again appeared in hot haste at the Hall.

"Have you heard?" he said breathlessly to Mr. Hillyer, who had heard nothing, his sister's condition during the previous day having excluded him from the outer world.

"It is the most singular thing," continued Sir Edward. "I went away from home yesterday, overwhelmed at the awful fate, as I supposed, of my poor friend. I had important business in York, and consequently fixed the inquest for to-morrow. Last night, when I reached home, my butler met me with the most unexpected story. The servants, who, like myself, were at first completely deceived, had gradually made the discovery that the body brought in is not Vandyken's; and I have now reason to believe it is that of a man named Clarence Dare."

Before Mr. Hillyer could recover from his surprise, Mr. Sherlock and Godfrey entered the room, and to them the news was immediately communicated.

"But how did the mistake arise in the first instance? Who found the body?" asked Mr. Sherlock.

"Some of the men of the farm. Vandyken not appearing at dinner time I thought it likely he had missed his way on the moors, and I sent out some labourers with lanterns to look for him. They went as far as the old Quarry without meeting a soul. There one fellow, sharper than the rest, noticed that the ground was broken, and bore marks of a fall or a struggle. By the light of their bull's-eyes they fancied they saw a dark mass at the bottom of the pit. One of them descended, found the body, mistook it for my guest's, and brought it home. It so happened that the footman who habitually waited on Vandyken was away; the women who laid out the corpse had never seen him close, and the rest of the household were as deceived as myself. The truth is the body was so disfigured that we all shrank from more than a cursory glance at it."

"You mean the face was disfigured: but was the resemblance otherwise striking," asked Godfrey, speaking for the first time.

"Most striking. Height, build, hair—all are alike. This Dare, if he it be, has a long, white beard like Vandyken's, and even the colour

of his suit, a grey one, is the same. But the cut is different; and his watch, chain and purse are also quite distinct. He wears a diamond pin, which, it seems, nobody ever saw on Vandyken, and he turns out, on measurement, to be a very little shorter."

"Are there any papers about him?"

"There is a letter which, strangely enough, is addressed to Van dyken."

"*Addressed to Vandyken!*" repeated in astonishment Mr. Hillyer, when sharply interrupted by Mr. Sherlock.

"And all this time, where *is* Vandyken?"

"He has disappeared."

"The plot thickens then," said Mr. Hillyer. "It is possible that there is some connection between this Dare's presence yesterday in the neighbourhood and Vandyken's sudden eclipse. You read the letter I conclude. Does it throw any light on the matter?"

"I can trust you all, of course," replied Sir Edward, after a moment's hesitation. "As the contents of the letter must be communicated to the coroner, they cannot be considered a secret. But Vandyken may return, or write and explain everything, and until then discretion is advisable. The letter is from a man in New York, who appears to have had business with Vandyken, and had apparently sent Dare over as an emissary to him. It points, I must own, to dealings of a very shady character, and threatens Vandyken with exposure and ruin, unless a marriage which the writer does not specify shall take place. I presume that the lady must be somebody belonging to Vandyken, a sister or a niece perhaps. I remember once hearing him say that he had no daughter."

"Do you know anything of his family?" asked Mr. Hillyer.

"To tell the truth, nothing. I liked the man, and became intimate with him too incautiously, I fear."

"Mrs. Chisholm has mentioned several times that she saw Miss Fane talking, the day before yesterday, to Mr. Vandyken at the old Quarry. That young lady could at least tell us at what hour the American was last visible in these parts." This suggestion came from Mr. Sherlock, and was met by a quick protest from Godfrey.

"I cannot see the use of tormenting Miss Fane," he exclaimed.

"Torment? Nonsense!" said Mr. Hillyer, briskly, unaware, perhaps, how much his latent dislike to Christobel added to his zeal. "We will send for Miss Fane immediately." And he rang the bell and gave the order. Godfrey looked annoyed.

Christobel came instantly in answer to the summons. Her manner was as calm as usual, but she turned a shade paler on observing Sir Edward. Godfrey drew forward a chair for her; then walked over to the fireplace and stood there in such a position as to face Christobel, while the three men had their backs to him. Sir Edward began by asking Miss Fane if she could state the exact time of her meeting with Mr. Vandyken. She had shown no surprise at the

baronet's news, and now answered: "If you allude to the meeting that Mrs. Chisholm witnessed the day before yesterday, the person I was then talking to was not Mr. Vandyken, but a man called Clarence Dare. I had known him very slightly, two years ago, in New York. I met him quite by chance on the moors, and was much surprised to see him, having no idea that he was in England. He told me that he was going to your house, Sir Edward, but had made a mistake in the line of railway and found himself at the wrong station. He had fancied the walk across the moors, and had consequently taken that road in preference to waiting two hours for a cross-country train."

"Did he mention his object in going to Meredyth's?" asked Mr. Hillyer.

"We know that he wished to see Vandyken," interrupted Godfrey, looking steadily at Christobel.

Mr. Sherlock turned and glanced at the young man, while Mr. Hillyer said petulantly, "Let Miss Fane answer for herself, Verschoyle. It is impossible otherwise to understand anything clearly."

"I beg pardon," replied Godfrey, good humouredly; "my impatient curiosity runs away with me. Proceed, Miss Fane. Dare, *of course*, mentioned Vandyken to you?"

"Yes. He asked if I knew for certain of his being still Sir Edward's guest."

"Had you been acquainted also with Vandyken in America?" resumed the host, and again Verschoyle interposed,

"You introduced him yourself to Miss Fane in this very house, a week ago. A much more important question is: When Miss Fane separated from Dare, did she leave him at the Quarry?"

"Yes," said Christobel, in a low voice, and for the second time betrayed some slight agitation.

"Was he alone?"

"When I met him he was quite alone."

"And when you left him?"

She clenched her hands tightly together, and looking at nobody but Godfrey, answered slowly, "He was with Mr. Vandyken, who came up while I was speaking to Dare. He appeared as much surprised to see him as I had been. Then—I left."

"So that is all you know?"

"*All*," repeated Christobel, firmly.

"And, consequently, the mystery is as great as ever," remarked Godfrey, coming forward with a bored expression, as if disappointed at learning no more. I can see nothing for you to do, Meredyth, but to wait quietly until Vandyken gives signs of life."

Sir Edward rose to go. "There is the inquest to-morrow. I am afraid I shall have to ask Miss Fane to appear at it and give testimony as to Dare's identity," he said, courteously.

Christobel answered that he could depend upon her, and Verschoyle accompanied Sir Edward to the hall door.

"I am glad that interrogatory is over," said Godfrey, standing by the baronet's horse. "That poor girl is naturally nervous, and very much shattered just now by Miss Millicent's death. With one exception, everybody in the house is either openly or covertly unkind to her. Mr. Hillyer's manner to her strikes me as particularly harsh. Does it not you?"

Sir Edward, being very kind-hearted, agreed at once.

"Women are always scared at even the shadow of the law, and hate being asked a string of questions. I am afraid Miss Fane will break down altogether to-morrow if the coroner badgers her. And you can see for yourself—any person of real penetration can—how sensitive she is, and how little she knows of the business after all," continued Verschoyle.

"Very little indeed," replied Sir Edward, flattered at being considered a person of "real penetration." "All right, I'll speak to Muirhead myself, and tell him to be gentle with her. He is a good fellow, though a bit of an ass. Good-bye." And the baronet rode off, thinking to himself that Verschoyle took an unusual amount of interest in Miss Fane, but that it was not to be wondered at, considering how handsome she was. And being imitative, he immediately began to feel interested in her himself.

At the inquest Christobel stated that she had known Clarence Dare in New York, having met him first at a dance in that city, and casually on various occasions later. Asked if he and Vandyken were intimate, she answered that according to common report they were, and so like one another as to be called the "Siamese Twins;" but affirmed (without being asked) that until the interview on the moors she had never seen them together. As she was quite unable to throw any light on what happened on that occasion, her examination did not last long, and nobody else being there to give testimony of any importance, the jury brought in a verdict of "Accidental Death," but appended a rider to the effect that there were circumstances in the case of grave suspicion against a person or persons unknown.

Vandyken all this time remained invisible, and the examination of his luggage left behind at Sir Edward's gave no clue as to his possible whereabouts. But the mystery of his disappearance was soon partially solved by the news of his ruin. The failure was gigantic, and the cablegram announcing it declared it also to be fraudulent. Vandyken suddenly figured as a daring and unscrupulous adventurer, who, for a time, had imposed himself successfully on the financial world of New York. His real name even appeared unknown.

Clarence Dare had evidently come to England as a messenger of evil tidings. Vandyken, on hearing his news, found the game was up, and presumably thought that the sooner he departed, leaving no trace behind him, the better. This, the charitable-minded, considered was quite sufficient explanation of his flight, between which and Dare's death there was not necessarily any connection.

But the police are not charitable-minded, and they intended to unearth Vandyken if they could, more especially as the government of his own country was pursuing him on a charge of swindling.

The papers were full of the affair for a few days, and the public expected great things. It was announced that the police had information, and that there would probably be a trial. Satisfied with this assurance, people were content to wait, and—waiting—they began to forget.

Meanwhile Miss Millicent had been buried with all the pomp becoming a Hillyer; but Christobel, at Geraldine's desire, remained for a few days at the Hall. Mr. Hillyer, disliking and mistrusting her, was not sorry to keep her near him until his sister's will was read. He had yet to determine the conduct he should observe towards Miss Fane should she be, as he feared, universal legatee.

A great surprise awaited him, however, in the discovery that Miss Millicent had nothing to leave. Her lawyers lost no time in communicating the fact that some years previously she had lost the greater part of her money in an unfortunate speculation, and had sunk the remainder in an annuity which enabled her to keep up a delusive appearance of wealth.

She had possessed very valuable plate and jewels; but on enquiry it appeared that these had vanished as utterly as her fortune. No trace of them was to be found, but Miss Millicent's maid, when questioned on the subject by Mr. Hillyer, expressed her belief that her mistress had secretly and gradually sold them. What she had done with the money thus realised became the next problem. Mr. Hillyer, in the bitterness of his heart, concluded that in one way or another it had been spent for the benefit of Christobel Fane. He was not sufficiently master of himself to prevent these suspicions becoming partially apparent when speaking with his sister's protégée, and the girl was deeply wounded by them. She said she knew nothing of the plate or jewels, but Mr. Hillyer had difficulty in believing her; and although good breeding made him conceal his incredulity, good-breeding was not always as strong as his resentment.

"May I be allowed to ask how your acquaintance with my sister began, Miss Fane?" he asked once, with evident irritation.

"I knew her through a mutual friend," replied Christobel, coldly.

"A friend of the family?"

"I have no reason to suppose so."

Mr. Hillyer was more than displeased. "You do not seem to be communicatively inclined, Miss Fane, but you must feel that my sister's extraordinary interest in you warrants curiosity on my part."

Christobel did not answer, and Mr. Hillyer, with fresh anger at her silence, continued: "Are you willing to account in no way for an attachment so sudden, and, considering my sister's nature and habits, you must allow me to add—so inexplicable?"

"Not *inexplicable*, I think," softly interposed Geraldine, who was present, gliding forward and taking her guest's hand. The colour rushed to Christobel's face. She was touched as any sign of sympathy from Geraldine alone had power to touch her.

"Your sister was old and lonely," she said, turning to Mr. Hillyer. "Was it so strange that at the end of her life, feeling weaker and more dependent, probably, than we ever guessed, she should have felt some need of love and companionship? You mistrust me, I know," added the girl, her voice vibrating with an unexplained emotion, "and I confess that I have not the power entirely to justify myself in your eyes. But, believe me, the strongest, *deepest* tie between myself and your sister was the solace, tardy and imperfect indeed, that my comprehension of her sorrows brought her."

She drew a little closer to Mr. Hillyer, and, looking up at him with her lovely, appealing eyes, clasped her hands together with the gesture of one who would supplicate, if she dared. The little movement, slight though it was, had something strangely pathetic in it, for it was eloquent of all the feeling that Christobel, for some reason, kept so resolutely veiled. Geraldine wondered how her father could resist it, but Mr. Hillyer felt nothing but a vexed disdain.

"Solace? Sorrow?" he repeated contemptuously. "You must excuse me, Miss Fane, but the question between us does not admit of sentiment. My sister chose to separate herself from her kindred, and to spoil her whole life, out of morbid regret for a worthless individual. I constantly made efforts to be reconciled to her ——"

He stopped abruptly. For all his callous egotism, Mr. Hillyer quailed beneath the sudden scorn of Christobel's glance. But rage was the feeling that predominated in him, and he resumed:

"I have asked some questions which you do not choose to answer. I do not know who you are. I do not *wish* to know—and I can see no reason for prolonging our interview."

"Nor I for burdening you further with my presence in any way," said Christobel. "I shall be gone in an hour."

"Oh no, no! Do not leave us in this manner. I entreat you to remain a little longer," exclaimed Geraldine.

"It is impossible," replied Christobel, firmly.

"Miss Fane knows her own business best, Geraldine," said Mr. Hillyer, who was angrily pacing the room. But his daughter, for once, did not mind his displeasure, and again addressing Christobel, she said earnestly, "What will you do in London, all alone? Forgive me for asking: Have you any friends?"

"I have friends, though not many. You are very good, but you must not vex yourself about me. No harm will come to me from being alone." And Christobel quitted the room.

She was as good as her word, and took leave of them in an hour. They were all assembled when she came to say farewell, and parted from her in a manner as various as their characters and their moods.

Mr. Hillyer was glacial; Geraldine sorrowful; Godfrey unusually earnest. Mrs. Chisholm thought the opportunity a good one for being insolent unrebuked, and was greatly surprised, not to say chagrined, when Mr. Sherlock transfixed everybody else with amazement by asking Miss Fane if she would leave an address.

Christobel crimsoned to the roots of her hair. It was evident that the demand embarrassed as much as it astonished her. With an effort, the girl replied that a letter addressed to Vere Street Post Office would always find her; and then she turned to go. Nobody spoke as she passed down the room, for the latest incident, as heightening the mystery which surrounded her, had impressed even Geraldine unfavourably. But as she reached the door, Godfrey sprang forward to open it, and uttered some words in a low voice, which, though unheard, were observed by two people—Mrs. Chisholm and Geraldine. The former was maliciously delighted—the latter turned pale, and endured an hour of doubt's keenest anguish. But since her engagement to Godfrey had become a settled thing, she had learnt to know him very well, and to trust him with all the fulness of a nature sweet indeed, but not uncourageous. And, later, she frankly asked him if he had been previously acquainted with Christobel.

"You have guessed it, then," said Godfrey, taking his betrothed's two little hands into his own. "Yes; I had known Christobel Fane before meeting her here, and I am acquainted with some facts of her strange and tragic history. I have never told you anything because I could not tell you all. But you are just and true, my darling. Will you trust me, and believe in *her?*"

Geraldine laid her pretty golden head on his shoulder, and said gently, "I will never ask you another question, and I will trust you to the end."

II.

Godfrey and Geraldine were to have been married before Christmas, when two unexpected events altered their plans. One of the younger Hillyer children fell ill of a lingering malady, and was ordered to London for treatment and advice. The little invalid had been Geraldine's especial care, and to leave her while ill was not to be thought of. So the marriage was put off: and the next thing to happen was the sudden and unexpected engagement of Mr. Hillyer to Mrs. Chisholm.

This event took everybody by surprise—the chief parties concerned, perhaps, as much as anybody. Perverseness on the gentleman's side and disappointment on the lady's probably accounted for their resolution. Mr. Hillyer, in his sullen, soured way, never lost the opportunity of doing a foolish thing; and Mrs. Chisholm had awakened abruptly to the knowledge that her admirers were diminishing as the signs of age in her increased. Be this as it may, the engagement was an ac

complished fact, and Geraldine had to welcome the widow in her new capacity with the best grace she could.

One result, and not the most agreeable, of this new state of things was that Mrs. Chisholm became inseparable from her "darling Dena."

On arriving in London, Mr. Hillyer took apartments in the street where his bride-elect resided, and that lady was oftener in his residence than in her own. Among their earliest visitors was Fortescue, who brought some surprising news about himself. He had lost a large sum of money, had sold out of the army, and set himself to study painting as a profession. He already attended an evening school of design, and was about to enter the studio of a friend who purposed to go abroad.

Geraldine was touched at his changed circumstances, and the manly courage which he showed under them. Mrs. Chisholm could not be expected to feel any interest in a person who was no longer rich; and she would have left the whole burden of the conversation to Miss Hillyer, had not Fortescue, after some hesitation, enquired for Christobel Fane.

Mrs. Chisholm saw her opportunity for wounding and, to do her justice, on such an occasion she was never backward.

"You have not heard, then, of the dreadful events in Fernholme?" she exclaimed. "Miss Fane——ah! I sadly fear——I regret that I did not at that time possess sufficient authority with Dena to have prevented all intimacy between her and *that unprincipled adventuress.*"

"I am afraid I must trouble you to explain yourself," said Fortescue, sternly; while Geraldine, more angry with Mrs. Chisholm than she cared to show, said hastily, "You read, I suppose, of Clarence Dare's death and the inquest?"

Yes, Fortescue had; but he failed to see in what way the facts which transpired could justify an unfavourable opinion of Miss Fane.

Mrs. Chisholm, assuming a long-suffering air, suggestive of unutterable things, remarked that she *might* be uncharitable; but in the world to which she had always belonged young ladies who surrounded themselves with mystery, who came one knew not whence, and went one knew not whither were not usually considered desirable acquaintances.

Fortescue's brow was darkening ominously. Geraldine, helped by Verschoyle, who came in while Mrs. Chisholm was speaking, hastened to change the conversation; but their visitor remained gloomy and distrait, and in a short time took his leave. Verschoyle went with him into the hall, and there laying a hand upon his shoulder, said kindly: "You must forgive me, old fellow, for having guessed something of your secret, and for telling you not to mind what is said by that little viper. Her malice and envy supply all her information, for she really knows nothing of Christobel Fane."

"And do you?" asked Fortescue, briefly.

"Circumstances have placed me in possession of some facts concerning her which I am not at liberty to divulge. But this much I can tell you, that a nobler or a purer woman never breathed."

"I don't need to be assured of that," replied Fortescue, with a gravity that spoke worlds for the depth of his feeling. "Can you tell me where she is?"

"I am as much in the dark as yourself at present, but I shall, I believe, know in time."

"Then I must wait. Good-bye."

The thought of Christobel had dwelt constantly with Fortescue since they parted. The desire to see her again, to learn the secret of her strange melancholy, and to win her love had been strengthened in him by absence. Uncertainty as to his future at the time of his abrupt departure from Fernholme had prevented his coming to any resolution; but Christobel had grown to be the one ideal which ennobled and brightened his life.

His own nature had changed through the necessity of work, and in the purer mental air to which his effort lifted him, her image—gracious, serious, solemnly sweet—seemed like an embodiment of all that was highest in his new-born aspirations. Through the loss of many illusions he had gained a truer insight and a holier faith; and he felt that, be appearances against her what they might, he would never again meet a woman so pure and noble as this mysterious and unknown girl. Uncertainty as to her fate had intensified his longing to see her, and now that Godfrey's words had given him fresh hope, he was lighter-hearted than he had been for weeks.

The following day he went to see the studio he was to occupy.

"It isn't bad for London, you see," said its actual tenant, Jack Vivian. "When it happens *not* to be foggy the light is very good. That open space at the back, dignified with the name of Cardigan Gardens, is not of an inviting aspect, but it affords a great deal of air, and those tall houses which flank one side, and are let out in flats, have something about them which, by a stretch of imagination, might be called Italian."

"The imagination then would require to be robust, and the stretch a very long one," said Fortescue, laughing, as he glanced at the row of red-brick houses, built on the latest æsthetic principles.

"You are unjust, my dear fellow. Look at that arched loggia on the top story. Last summer, when the weather was not too sneezy, an old Italian music-master was accustomed to come out there and smoke, and latterly an uncommonly pretty girl has appeared at times to feed some pigeons. By jove! there she is."

And Fortescue, glancing carelessly upwards, beheld Christobel Fane!

"Isn't she lovely?" continued Vivian, enthusiastically. "I have been making frantic efforts to know her, but so far have only succeeded in becoming acquainted with the old man, Mirandola. He

lives with an ancient sister and this beautiful girl, whom they guard like dragons. By-the-by, you used to sing at one time. Didn't Mirandola teach you?"

"Yes," said Fortescue.

"Lucky dog! Then you will be able to call, the temptation of renewing your former acquaintance with the maestro being too great to resist. And Mirandola will have to introduce you to his niece, whether he likes it or not."

"But why do you call her his niece?"

"She must be something to him, and her recent appearance on the scene is against the hypothesis of her being his daughter. Going, old fellow; good-bye. I start for Italy to-morrow."

The first thing Fortescue did, after installing himself in the studio the next day, was to walk to the window and strain his eyes upwards. They were not blessed anew with the gracious vision that had charmed them before; but the mere knowledge that such a thing was possible transformed Cardigan Square into a Garden of Armida.

He did not lose much time in calling on Signor Mirandola, and was most warmly received. The little Italian had heard of his former pupil's reverse of fortune, but that rather added to than detracted from the cordiality of his greeting. He introduced Fortescue to his sister, who presently came in—a quiet, dried-up little spinster, as Italian as she could be, although out of love for her brother she had wrenched herself from the land of her birth.

Her conversation, although genial, was limited, and Signor Mirandola having exhausted his first raptures, was perforce beginning them (like Browning's thrush) all over again; when Fortescue, in sheer desperation, asked them if they lived all alone.

"We have an invalid friend, who never goes out," said Signor Mirandola, carelessly.

"And latterly we have taken into the house a pupil of my brother's, a young lady, who will probably enter the profession one day, but at present earns her livelihood by teaching," added the Signora.

Almost before she finished speaking Fortescue sprang to his feet, for the door had opened and Christobel stood inside it. On perceiving the visitor she started and turned red, then deadly pale. Her first expression had been unmistakably one of gladness, but it was succeeded by a look of terror. She glanced in a curious, helpless way at Signor Mirandola.

"At last I have found you," said Fortescue, in a low voice, as he took her passive hand. "I seem to have waited years for it."

Signor Mirandola, doubtless enlightened as to the real object of his visitor's coming, became rather cold in manner, but to this Fortescue remained obstinately blind. The charm of his bearing, which could be great when he chose, vanquished the Signora Marianna, who, like a true woman, was much struck by the advantage to Christobel of having so delightful a young man in love with her. When Fortescue

rose to go, she invited him to return, and added that the best time would be evening.

"He will make it less dreary when you are out," she answered later, with quiet obstinacy to her brother's remonstrances. "You know that Concetta" (the Mirandola's one servant and Marianna's foster sister) "never tells anything for all her talking, and why should not that poor girl see the young man sometimes? I believe he wants to marry her."

Needless to say that Fortescue was not slow to avail himself of the kindly old maid's invitation; and it soon became quite a habit with him to mount those five pairs of stairs—ostensibly for a game of whist which, when her brother was not present, the Signora Marianna was invariably allowed to win.

The little household would have interested Fortescue even had Christobel not been there. It had remained singularly foreign, as many such households in London do. Concetta, who, as Marianna said, "talked so much and told so little," cooked *risotti* for her master, made soupe maigre for her mistress, and argued with both of them as though she had never left her native hills.

Signora Marianna, the soul of Piedmontese method and order, tied a silk pocket-handkerchief over her grey locks of a morning, and swept and dusted with praiseworthy energy. Her brother rated his womankind from dawn to dewy eve, and spent most of his evenings abroad. He raved about everything English, and outwardly conformed to all our habits. Au fond he remained as Italian as Concetta.

One evening every week the Signora Marianna received her friends—dark-eyed Italians, who talked at the top of their voices, and made the tiny room dim with smoke. They laughed and sang and rattled away at the piano, and stared at Christobel with a frank admiration which made Fortescue furious. *He* preferred the quiet evenings, when, the game over and Marianna appropriately dozing, he could look as long as he liked into Christobel's lovely eyes. He was very happy on these occasions, and yet not entirely so, for in spite of Christobel's gentleness to him, the veil of her strange melancholy was never lifted. He was near her, he spoke to her, he loved her more and more every day, but he could draw no closer to her in spirit than at first.

He hated to think that there was a mystery about her, and yet he could not but feel it. He never questioned her, and she rarely spoke about herself, only sometimes praising enthusiastically the kindness shown her by the Mirandolas. At the first hint from Fortescue of love, she shrank so visibly that he dared not again approach the subject, but he waited and hoped on with the patient fidelity that was characteristic of his nature.

There was one thing, and one only, in the Mirandolas' treatment of her that annoyed him. They allowed her to devote herself, unnecessarily, as it seemed to him, to the invisible invalid, that "cousin," who

"was slowly dying." Constantly Christobel was summoned to him, and would remain so long as to exhaust Fortescue's patience.

Marianna, guessing, perhaps, his feelings, explained to him that the caprices of sick people are many, and that her cousin liked no one to be near him so well as Christobel. Fortescue could not be reconciled to the thought of her being the slave of a fretful invalid, and told himself that the Mirandolas might have relieved her of such a task, had they chosen.

Once he even went so far as to make some observation of the kind to Christobel herself, but she checked him at once, saying simply:

"You do not understand. I do nothing but what I like."

"All this time Fortescue had not mentioned to the Hillyers, or even to Verschoyle, that he had discovered Christobel. Instinctively he felt that she would prefer his being silent, and the secret was so exquisite to him that to divulge it would have been a pain.

As an excuse for seeing her oftener and for looking at her longer, he asked her to let him make a sketch of her head. She consented, on condition that the little picture, when finished, should be a present to Signor Mirandola on his birthday, and the sittings were in consequence kept unknown to that gentleman. Sometimes Marianna accompanied Christobel to the studio; sometimes Concetta. As both promptly dropped asleep, it would be hard to say which of the two made the more delightful chaperone.

A month had passed in this way, when Mrs. Chisholm, always bent on being charming, and having nothing very particular to do, suddenly bethought herself that she would visit Fortescue's studio.

"She did not," as she explained to Geraldine, "suppose that he had the least talent," having a way of concluding that people who lose money must be insignificant at best, but patronage had its charms for her, and she felt that "the poor fellow would be so glad to see them." So one day, when out with Geraldine, she suddenly ordered the coachman to drive her to Cardigan Gardens, and almost before Fortescue had time to say "come in," she followed up her knock by putting her fashionably-adorned head inside the studio-door.

The apparition delighted Fortescue moderately, more especially as he had not time to conceal Christobel's portrait, on which Mrs. Chisholm pounced at once.

"What do I see?" she exclaimed. "Dena, look here! How like! Flattered, though. Surely not a sketch from memory?" and she turned in rapid interrogation to Fortescue.

"I have had a few sittings."

"Then Miss Fane is in London? But I suppose I must not ask. Hum—Is that landscape yours?—I am no judge—you have not much to show—doubtless you have been occupied in *many* ways. Dena, I think we ought to go. Mr. Fortescue may be expecting a model."

And with the airy impertinence in which she was mistress, Mrs.

Chisholm swam from the room. "Do give me Christobel's address," said Geraldine, in a low voice to Fortescue.

He complied, adding, "I met her accidentally, but I suppose it is useless to try and make Mrs. Chisholm believe that."

The widow sat back in her carriage for about a quarter of an hour in unbroken silence. Then, finding that Geraldine refrained from all remarks, she observed austerely:

"It is not that I have the least desire or curiosity to see any more of such a person, but I confess that had Mr. Fortescue not deliberately concealed that shameless girl's address, I should have thought better of him."

"He gave it to me as soon as I asked for it," said Geraldine, calmly. "It is 14, Glen Isla Mansions."

Upon which Mrs. Chisholm immediately pulled the check-string and ordered the coachman to drive there.

Christobel was at home, and Geraldine did what she could by the sweetness and kindness of her own manner to cover the insolence of Mrs. Chisholm. She found Christobel nervous and ill at ease, but attributed it to the unwelcome presence of the widow. The latter, on her side, noted everything, cross-questioned Marianna when Christobel, as usual, was summoned from the room, and drew her own conclusions.

"A sick cousin of yours!" she repeated. "An Italian, of course, who has taken exclusively to Miss Fane. Very touching, I am sure, and very *strange*."

She continued questioning, and Marianna told her several fibs with a truly Southern air of candour. She did not resent being interrogated as an Englishwoman would have done, but, all the same, she was careful not to let her visitor learn more than was necessary.

Mrs. Chisholm took her leave at last with great politeness, and remained suspiciously amiable all that day and for several days following. They communicated their discovery and subsequent visit to Verschoyle, who, as Mrs. Chisholm did not fail to remark, appeared not at all astonished; and she surprised a glance between him and Mr. Sherlock which set her thinking.

Since her engagement to Mr. Hillyer, her interest in the inscrutable old Australian had increased enormously. She was very uneasy at the interest which, as she fancied, he took in Christobel Fane; and she was determined that it should in no way benefit its object, if she could help it. With this laudable purpose, she set herself to watch and listen, and one day her patience was rewarded.

Mr. Sherlock had lately once or twice received a visit from a person whom he called Mr. Petrie, who greatly excited Mrs. Chisholm's curiosity, inasmuch as the conversations between him and the old gentleman were very long and apparently very interesting.

"Could he be Mr. Sherlock's lawyer?" thought Mrs. Chisholm. "And was he drawing up a will?"

A suspicion so excruciating was not to be borne.

Mrs. Chisholm, descending the stairs one day and peeping over the banister, saw Mr. Sherlock in the act of ushering out Mr. Petrie. They paused at the hall-door, and exchanged a few words. These had reference to some previous conversation, but a fragment of the phrase which reached the listener's ear struck her with amazement. She stealthily crept down a few steps, and, hiding herself in a curve of the landing, was fortunate enough to hear a little more.

Half an hour later she drove off hastily in a cab "to her milliner's," as she took care to inform Geraldine. But in that case the milliner lived in a very unfashionable neighbourhood, for the four-wheeler deposited Mrs. Chisholm at Scotland Yard.

III.

THE next evening Fortescue, going as usual to the Mirandolas', saw on arriving that something was amiss. In his quick anxiety for Christobel, it was a relief to him to learn that the misfortune which had come upon the household had nothing to do with her.

"It was the poor cousin who was dead," explained Marianna, struck painfully, like all Italians, by the coming of the King of Terrors, but obviously more scared than grieved. "He died at last quite suddenly—*poveretto*—although they had been expecting the end for some days. Sad? Oh, yes! Death is always that. And then he suffered very much, which of course was dreadful to witness. Otherwise ——" Marianna checked herself suddenly—strangely as it even seemed to Fortescue—and, with a curious look of compunction, she hurried towards Christobel, who noiselessly and slowly had just entered the room.

"Good heavens! How pale you are!" exclaimed Fortescue, as he, too, went forward and took her listless hand.

She was indeed deadly pale, and in her eyes was the strained, intent look that belongs to strong and suppressed emotion.

"This death has been too trying for you. You have had too much watching ——"

"Hush!" interrupted Christobel. "The watching was long, but it is ended. You must not grudge it to him. You do not understand."

He did not understand! It was the second time she had used that expression. Did all the mystery of her life lie there?

She had sunk into a chair, her hands folded in her lap—passive—silent—strangely still.

Marianna went over to her, and began gently stroking her hair. The fondling seemed like an effort at consolation, for it was accompanied by softly murmured epithets of pity, and hints at some future in which hope would revive. Fortescue stood dumb; feeling that he ought to go, yet passionately longing to stay.

Suddenly there was a peal at the bell, then the sound of many

voices—men's voices in the hall. Concetta, with a scared look, threw open the door, and the little room seemed filled with strangers.

Marianna gave a startled cry. Christobel sprang up, with a set, pallid face, but an inexplicable gleam of exultation and defiance in her eyes.

"Your business?" asked Fortescue curtly, of the intruders. One of them stepped forward and produced a slip of paper. "Our business is to arrest George Vandyken—alias Fane—alias Harold Fane Hillyer," he said.

With a swift movement, Christobel traversed the room, and the narrow passage beyond, then paused at a closed door.

"Come!" she said, and her tone was so commanding that they all obeyed in silence. As they reached the door she threw it open and signed to them to enter. They followed her as she approached the bed, then stood amazed and awed, when she drew down the sheet that covered the face of a corpse. "You cannot touch him," she said, with tragic triumph. "You have come too late. And now, will you leave me alone with him. He was my father."

She sank on her knees beside the body and laid her arms across it, as though she would still protect him dead whom her limitless devotion had shielded living.

They did her behest, and left her alone with her dead. Later, when the men of law had left the house, Marianna sent Fortescue in to her, saying sadly: "Take her away from there if you can."

She rose at once when he spoke to her, and stood quietly listening to his words. But there was so heart-breaking a stillness about her that his own anguish was too strong, and he cried passionately, "My dear, do not look at me with those eyes! Be brave! Your task is ended. Can you not now be at peace?"

He stretched his arms out towards her, but she evaded his embrace.

"It is ended, but not the shame of it," she answered in a low voice of intensest pain. "You are kind, but even *you* are too happy to comprehend me, for disgrace has never touched you."

"But why dwell on such thoughts?" urged Fortescue. "The disgrace was not yours. Why should *you* seek to expiate it?"

"Do not try to console me now," she said. "I can think of nothing except that nobody will regret him."

And with one of the simple pathetic movements habitual to her, she laid her hand upon her dead father's brow, as if seeking by the unconscious sanctity of her own pure touch to cancel the infamy which branded that dishonoured head! In silence Fortescue quitted her presence. Yet he would have given his life to comfort her.

The next morning a note came for him from Verschoyle, asking him to go to the Hillyers. Guessing that the purpose of it had some reference to Christobel, he went there at once.

He found Mr. Hillyer pacing the room in some excitement. Mr. Sherlock, Godfrey, Geraldine and Mrs. Chisholm were present.

"You have heard the news?" said Verschoyle. "Harold Hillyer

and Vandyken were one and the same person. He had been in hiding at Mirandola's, and when the police went to arrest him last night he had just died."

"What I should like to know," said Mr. Sherlock, after Fortescue had signified that the news was none to him, "what I should like to know is, who denounced him to the police?" And he fixed his small, inquisitive eyes on Mrs. Chisholm, who turned a lively red. But she was equal to the occasion, saying quickly, "The real mystery is, how came he to be concealed at the Mirandolas', and what was the real tie between himself and Miss Fane?"

"You have heard—she was his daughter," said Godfrey.

"And as to the Mirandolas' share in the business, I can throw some light on that," remarked Fortescue. "The Signora Marianna told me that some years ago in New York, Vandyken, then at the beginning of his prosperity, was singularly kind to her brother and herself. They had both been very ill, the climate not agreeing with them, and Vandyken gave them money wherewith to come to Europe. His daughter, who passed as his niece, was with him at the time, and the Mirandolas, knowing her father's equivocal position, pitied her profoundly. Mirandola himself, hearing her voice once, told her that if she ever left America for Europe, he would be glad to give her lessons and enable her to earn her living as a singer."

"And the resolution on her part to leave New York was greatly owing, in the end, to me," added Godfrey. "I met her; like the Mirandolas, I pitied her, seeing how she shrank from the vile crew of male and female adventurers who surrounded and traded on her uncle, or father, as he really was. There was one horrible German Jew, a certain Hochheimer (whose letter to Vandyken was found in Clarence Dare's pocket), who wished to marry her, and plainly used some power he possessed over her father to that purpose. Chance, one evening, caused me to find Miss Fane alone. She was so wretched, so helpless and friendless that she was led to confide in me. I advised her to go to London and accept Mirandola's offer. Through my help, she sold some diamonds and other valuables, which Vandyken had given her, and with the money thus raised she came to England—to Mirandola's. *He* gave her lessons, and in a year she began her career as a concert-singer. This was abruptly cut short by her introduction to Miss Millicent, who took her to live with her ——"

"How do you know this? And how came Miss Millicent to make her acquaintance and recognise her identity?" interrupted Mrs. Chisholm, who had been listening to Godfrey's story with an air of mingled incredulity and contempt.

"On the last point Miss Fane herself alone can enlighten us. In regard to what she did after her return to England, all my information was obtained thanks to Mr. Sherlock," said Verschoyle.

"Really," said Mrs. Chisholm, "this young woman appears to have succeeded in interesting a great number of persons about herself."

"I was interested in her from the first moment that I saw her," said Mr. Sherlock, calmly ignoring the malice of the widow's speech. "I talk so little that I think I observe more than other people. I noticed a resemblance—at times very striking—in Miss Fane to Vandyken, and that was the first thing that set me thinking. My cousin Millicent's strange agitation did not appear to me at all explicable merely on the hypothesis of her failing mind, and this made the second link in my chain of suspicion. Finally, when you, Hillyer, were cross-questioning Miss Fane as to what happened at the Quarry, I remarked what seemed to me like a secret understanding between the young lady and Verschoyle. You may remember, Mrs. Chisholm, that you had the same idea, and were constantly speaking of it, so I must not exaggerate the merit of my own acuteness."

Mrs. Chisholm, annoyed, bit her lip, but made no reply; and Mr. Sherlock, with his furtive smile, resumed:

"I boldly accused Verschoyle of previous acquaintance with Miss Fane, and seeing that I was really interested, he owned to it at once. But he did not tell me her real identity, for, on her first arrival at the Hall, she had bound him to secrecy, and he considered that it was the business of the police, and not his, to unravel the mystery surrounding Vandyken and Clarence Dare. But he told me enough to make me more kindly than ever towards the poor girl, and as soon as I arrived in London, I set a private detective to work to discover where she was living. I am fond of surprises, and I had planned one which would have reinstated Miss Fane in everybody's good opinion. In this I have been foiled through information given to Scotland Yard, and the consequent discovery of Vandyken, or rather Harold Hillyer. I have an old friend in the police, and by going to him this morning I have been able to learn some interesting particulars as to Vandyken's intended arrest. They (the police) were thrown off the track in the first instance by the delay that ensued before Clarence Dare was recognised—that is, discovered *not* to be Vandyken. This gave the latter time to get clear off. He went as far as Calais, shaved off his beard, and then did the very cleverest thing he could do in returning to London and (presumably) seeking out his daughter. He was, perhaps, determined to this by illness, for it seems that for some time past he had suffered from disease of the heart. The Mirandolas' was the last house where anybody thought of looking for him—and some false information further misled the police, in causing them to conclude that Miss Fane had also left the country. But they had corrected their various mistakes, obtained many particulars from America, and were probably within twenty-four hours of discovering Vandyken, when somebody told them all they wanted, and their purpose was frustrated only by the hand of Death."

Mr. Sherlock paused, and there ensued an awkward silence. Much was still unexplained, and many questions might have been asked, but for the various considerations which imposed silence upon everybody.

Fortunately, a few hours later, a letter which came from Christobel cleared up much that was still doubtful. It was addressed to Mr. Hillyer, and written with a simple mournfulness that was inexpressibly touching.

"My father," she wrote, "married my mother under the name of Fane. He shortly afterwards deserted her on the pretext of poverty, and we—that is, my mother and I—went to live with her parents on a farm in a remote part of Canada. She loved my father passionately, and would never listen to a word against him. She lived not many years, but during that time she taught me to think of him as one so sinned against that all blame would have been cruel. My grandparents—austere, reserved, and stern—did not love me much, I think, and they execrated my father's name. I learnt, consequently, to long for his coming (and my mother had always said he would return), as for the advent of a deliverer who would release me from bondage. At last he did come—rich apparently, and seemingly happy. His presence brought joy and gladness to my sombre life. My grandfather and grandmother could not, indeed, believe in him, but that seemed to me a little thing. They parted with me not too reluctantly, and I accompanied my father to New York. On the journey he communicated to me that he was known there as Vandyken, and that I should be introduced as his niece.

"For some reason, as I afterwards found, he had chosen to represent himself as unmarried, and explanations at so tardy a date would have been inconvenient. The deception involved in all this was hateful to me; it dimmed the brightness of the ideal which I had formed in regard to him; but he was exquisitely kind to me, and I loved him still. My life in New York was one long series of humiliations—one lesson of disappointed faith. I left at last because my father wished to force me into a marriage that was hateful to me. I came to London and sought out the Mirandolas. I had known them in New York, and my father had been kind to them. They received me with all the fervour of their warm, grateful hearts. One day, to my surprise, I had a visit from Miss Millicent. She had received a letter from my father, written, I think, chiefly with the object of obtaining money from her. At the same time he told her of my presence in London; for he hoped, I believe, that acquaintance with me might incline her more favourably towards himself. Little did he know how fondly, through all these years, she had loved, how faithfully trusted, how passionately regretted him! My own diminished affection for him seemed to acquire fresh ardour from contact with hers. Her great, consuming grief was that my father was angry with her, and, on coming to England, would not see her. He had been disappointed at the comparatively small sum which she had sent him, and which she had obtained through the sale of her jewels and plate. He thought her rich, and the discovery that she had but an annuity had been a great blow.

"This letter is written as a kind of expiation for my coming to your house under false pretences, and consequently I will conceal nothing. Miss Millicent brought me to Hillyer Hall for a purpose which I only divined after I got there: it was to make me acquainted with Mr. Sherlock. She had a wild plan, born of the purpose that had marred her life, of inducing *him* eventually to hold out a helping hand to her brother, my father, who was constantly impressing upon her by letter that his ruin and disgrace were imminent.

"We neither of us knew, on arriving, that my father was Sir Edward Meredyth's guest, for he wrote to me very irregularly, and sometimes not for two or three weeks together.

"I suffered deeply at being introduced to you under a false name, but, alas! I had never borne any other, and I do not think that you would have cared to acknowledge me as your niece. Moreover, I had been vanquished by Miss Millicent's entreaties. She had a vehement intensity of purpose, which I now believe had something of insanity in it; and she was so good to me—to me, whom few had cared for. As regards Clarence Dare, you know that he came as an emissary to my father from a former associate in New York. The latter had a great hold over my father, and could have ruined him at any time—did really ruin him at the last. I had been slightly acquainted with Dare, but that happened to be just before my departure from America, and at a time when my father was temporarily absent. I consequently, only spoke the truth at the inquest when saying that I had never seen them together before the fatal Sunday when Dare met his death.

"I left them as I have already stated at the old Quarry, for I had perceived Mrs. Chisholm hovering about, and I had no wish to be discovered with them by her. As to all that happened afterwards, I must repeat what my father told me. Clarence Dare's death appears to have been purely the result of an accident. The news which he brought was very, very grave, and necessitated my father's immediate return to London. He did not know at what hour or in what way his enemy might strike him, and he shrank from the idea of exposure overtaking him while under Sir Edward's roof. Moreover, he wished to escape to Sweden and there to await events. He had barely time enough to catch the afternoon express, which started from the station at which Dare had descended. Just as he was hurrying away, the latter called out to him that he would walk on to the nearest town and there pass the night (for my father and he had exchanged some angry words, and neither cared to be with the other) only, he added, he must be lent some money, for he had lost his purse.

"My father took out two or three sovereigns and threw them to him. They fell into the grass, and Dare went down on his knees to search for them. The ground, as you will remember, was found broken; presumably it slipped, and the unfortunate man was carried to the bottom of the pit.

"At Calais my father was attacked with illness and a great longing to be with me possessed him. On his way back to London he read in the papers of Dare's death and Miss Millicent's. Weakened and unnerved as he already was, and not knowing what revelations I might be entrapped into making, it suddenly struck him that he might be suspected of having caused Dare's death. Terror-stricken at the bare thought, he came to London and threw himself on the mercy of the Mirandolas. They guessed, I think, that he was dying, and they would not turn him from their door. I joined him there on my arrival, and thanks to the Mirandolas' foreign environment, we were able to escape detection—until detection had no longer any terrors.

"This is all I have to tell. To the end of my life I shall think gratefully—ah! how gratefully! of your daughter. But I promise that you, not seeking them, will never again have tidings of me."

This was the end of the letter, and Mr. Hillyer had hardly finished reading it aloud, when Geraldine sprang up and hurried to the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Chisholm.

"To my cousin," she said simply, and for once Mr. Hillyer had nothing to say.

The two girls met—with infinite pity on Geraldine's part, and gratitude on Christobel's—with whom, however, no entreaties availed to induce her to come among her own kinsfolk.

"There is a gulf set between us," she said. "For all your compassion, I feel that I cannot belong to you in fact, any more than in name."

A less generous nature than Geraldine's might have resented such an answer, but she understood all its pride, its sorrow, its unavailing regret too thoroughly to be moved to any feelings but reverence and sympathy.

Slowly, very slowly, Christobel awoke again to gladness.

It was many months before she would listen to Fortescue's pleading, and consent to reward his patient, unchanging love. And although profoundly happy at last, she never could be called merry.

The bells that should chime sweetly of joy and love in the sunny springtide of youth had been jangled in her ears so long that some painful echo of their harshness dwelt with her always. But Fortescue, Geraldine, and all who loved her, only loved her the more for the subtle mournfulness of which some among them knew the secret, but which to strangers seemed like a spiritual crown set on her pure and perfect loveliness—perchance by an angel, in some hour of hushed and holy communing.

A HEROINE OF THE GUTTER.

It was a day in last July,
The hottest day of all,
The sun smote from the heavy sky,
A sullen brazen ball.
The sort of day that makes you think
Of fields, and cooling things to drink.

To my mind sunshine tries the slum
More than the drizzly days ;
Beyond the actual city's hum
Stretch out these grimy ways,
Rank, noxious, pitifully bare,
Under the searching summer glare.

A four-year girl marched down the street,
Most self-possessedly proud ;
Behind, more curious than discreet,
Followed an anxious crowd.
She had a halfpenny to spend,
And all the gutter must attend.

The Neapolitan, whose trade
Plies brisk on days like this,
Poured the unwilling lemonade
Guiltless of faintest fizz.
My little heroine stooped to drink,
And paused upon the very brink.

Three pairs of clutching, greedy paws,
Six eyes that gloat for sips,
Three noses tilted in applause,
Six hopefully-licked lips,
All close behind—the treat *must* pass
Round—and returns, an empty glass !

My little girl had never heard
Of Christian self-denial,
She only gazed, without a word,
At empty glass and phial,
And sighed to see there was "no more"—
An unked thing when one is four !

The lemonade flowed after that
In streams—for I stood treat ;
And grinning Giulio waves his hat
Whene'er I cross the street :
While sure some Angel treasured up
The record of that emptied cup !

THE INVALIDS' CORNER.

A SKETCH.

By J. E. Panton.

WHERE the pine trees droop over the side of the cliff, and appear as if longing to plunge into the lovely stretch of sea before them, is a tiny nook that even in December is a regular sun-trap, and is known to everyone in Drayton as the Invalids' Corner.

It is a sad little corner, for here come those who have but a short time to remain among the living, while their nerveless fingers clutch nervously at the warm rugs that are wrapped round their knees, and whose large eyes gaze ever out to sea, as if they could catch a glimpse of the country inhabited by shadows, whither they are surely hastening.

Most of the invalids have relations who come and sit by them, anxiously noting each change in the wind, or watching eagerly for the first signs of the disappearance of the sun, when they will hurry away their charges before the air has time to chill in the very least. But, perhaps, the hardest cases of all are the isolated invalids, who somehow or other seem left to die alone: poor old maids or bachelors who cling to an empty existence in the strangest manner, doubtless waiting for better days in the way we all, rich and poor, sick and well, are apt to do. Fortunately these cases are few and far between, and are so piteous that someone or other is generally ready to give their sympathy to the solitary invalid; and often the Invalids' Corner is the scene of romances that sometimes end in a happier manner than one might expect from their sad surroundings.

But Francis Priestly—returned invalided from India, and condemned, as he termed it, to six months' solitary confinement on his back in a warmer spot than London—cared for nothing much, save his own discomfort. At first he had rebelled openly against his doctor's fiat, and said he would rather die than go to Drayton. But on Doctor Parkyns saying that in that case he must get another medical man to attend him, for he would not, he gave in, and consented to try the proposed remedy. It would, Dr. Parkyns assured him, if he could only learn patience and quiet waiting, end in making him quite well. But patience was not known to Francis Priestly. All through his life he had suffered from his own precipitancy—he had invariably been in a hurry.

Long ago, he had been engaged to the pretty daughter of the rector of the parish where his father's park was situated. But she could not leave her father until her next sister was ready to take her place at the head of the big, motherless household; and Francis,

accusing her of not loving him, had dashed away to join his regiment, leaving Edith broken-hearted. He had married, on board ship, the pretty, silly, childish wife that had made him miserable for six years, and had finally eloped, leaving him with four babies and a ruined life. But she died of fever only a month after, and he had sent the children home to his wife's parents, and now was quite alone in the world.

He had never felt this before he was ill; he had always more friends than he could count; and what with one thing and another, time had never hung heavily on his hands. But now it was really terrible. And, perhaps, the worst part of his illness was the way in which all the past eight years seemed to pass in procession before him, repeating, as they filed before his waking or sleeping vision: "You have brought it all on yourself, you know. If you had only waited for the gifts we had for you, you would have been happy, prosperous and well; but you took forcibly what was never meant for you, and now you see the consequences."

He had not a sister, and his father and mother were both dead. The family place was his brother's now; and his sister-in-law, always regarding her husband's younger brothers as so many harpies anxious to fall upon any stray crumbs that fell from her table, was not likely to welcome an invalid, who might want months and months of nursing, possibly only to die in the end. A good servant did all he could for Major Priestly; but a servant is not much when that is all one has to rely upon for sympathy, conversation, and anything else that is wanted to while away the long, weary days and nights of illness.

It was now December. At Drayton, where the eye rests contentedly on miles of blue-green fir-trees, whose only difference in winter is an added shade of dusk in the distance, there was nothing to remind anyone that Christmas was not more than a fortnight off. Yet so it was, and Major Priestly felt more melancholy than ever, and looked back regretfully to past Christmases at the Manor—Christmases when he and Edith had been all in all to each other; they had spent their time in decorating the church, hanging Christmas-trees with ornaments for the Sunday-school children, and in keeping the peace between all those who came forward to help them.

As Major Priestly remembered the date: lying in his long chair facing the sea, that literally gleamed like a turquoise under a cloudless sky, with the Isle of Wight rising like a snowy cloud just on the left of the horizon, and the chines glittering redly in the sunshine: the view seemed to fade, and he saw, instead, Priestly church, and the heaps of prickly evergreens, and could smell the various mingled odour of damp, crushed leaves and holly-berries, that was always connected in his mind with Christmas. Could he not well recollect, too, how he and Edith had spent hours on their knees, sticking gorgeous red and blue and gold letters on squares of card-board, that, when completed, should

form a text to go round the ugly, dark-brown galleries? He smiled to himself as he remembered how the letters would curl up in a sticky festoon on his fingers; how crooked they got; and how, finally, when it was really done and duly arranged in heaps in the aisle, ready for erection, the old clerk took advantage of their temporary absence at luncheon to prepare a surprise for them: had put up the text just as the letters came, anyhow, and by the time they had returned, had completed sentences that would have defied the cleverest hand at solving "buried sentences," that ever won a prize in any society journal of the present day.

Perhaps the thought of old days had somewhat obscured Major Priestly's generally acute senses, but he could have declared that he heard Edith's voice distinctly as he awoke from his half-dreamy state to recognise Drayton, and heard her say: "The other side of the chine will be best, Dugald; then we shall not be in the way of that poor gentleman."

Involuntarily he closed his eyes once more, and lay very quiet. Then he opened them again, and saw on his right hand the fair, oval face, and waves of brown, soft hair that he could never forget while life lasted, as belonging to his lost love. Older a little; yes, certainly; but otherwise the Edith of eight years ago sat there unchanged.

The old, old feeling surged over his breast, and he knew in a moment that the love he had felt for her was only asleep, and had risen, stronger than ever, from its repose, to assert its empire over him once more.

He watched her carefully, noted the calm, sweet countenance it rested him to look at, saw how her dexterous fingers arranged her companion's chair and rugs in the warmest place, fronting the very prettiest part of the view. And Major Priestly thought testily, how he had vainly tried to get Stokes to put his chair in a position that would enable him just to catch that reflection of the sun on the gleaming sand-banks; and had as vainly told him that his rug would slip off him, and leave his feet exposed to the air, if it were not tucked under them properly.

It did not take many hours to make him profoundly abhor Edith's companion. He could not make out in the least who he could be. None of the brothers' names would return to his mind; but he felt certain had one been named Dugald, he must have remembered such an uncommon cognomen. Then the idea flashed into his mind, remaining there obstinately: Edith was married, and this long, ill-looking invalid was her husband.

In the meantime Edith had been gazing attentively at Major Priestly, and had begun to think in her turn that she was dreaming. Since her lover's marriage she had never heard of him. She had had an illness, on learning his perfidy, that left her weak for months, and after that no one had cared to mention his name before her. She knew he had children, but no mention of his wife's elopement and subsequent death had ever reached her ears, and she believed

him to be happy, well and prosperous, several thousand miles from the quiet pine-clad shores of Drayton.

When she recognised him, her first impulse was to rise from her seat, and go away anywhere, no matter in what direction, so that it led her from his immediate presence. But in a few minutes pride came to her aid, and turning to her companion, she offered in a low voice to continue reading to him. But Dugald declined her offer; he would rather sit quietly and think, he said. He felt much stronger already, and this delicious air gave him new life. If Edith would like, why should she not see where the deep-red chine to the left led? Then she could come back to him and tell him all the ways of the place. In a few days, perhaps by Christmas, he added, hopefully:

"I shall be able to go with you and verify your description. But now leave me, if you like, dear Edith, and I will tell you all that happens in your absence."

But Edith said she felt tired and could not walk that morning; and she sat quietly looking out at the brown-sailed fishing-boats, as they glided out, one by one, past the sand-banks, into the open sea, in quest of fish.

Did Major Priestly remember, as she did, how she and he used to make the fisher-boats at home into omens. And, according to the number that passed them in a certain time, obtain answers to their questions respecting their future? Did he recollect how, the very night before their quarrel, he and she had gone to the cliffs beyond the Manor; and when he had declared he would let the fisher-boats decide their future for him, and the odd number had answered "Yes" to his enquiry as to whether she was to go with him to India or not: a late boat had crossed the long path of moonlight that led from the sea to the sky, and answered "No," at the very moment in which he was clasping her in his arms, overjoyed at even the mere idea of her giving up her duties at home to go with him? Nay, he could not remember, as she did, every sail on the tiny vessel, as they gleamed for a moment like a sheet of silver, and then passed away into shadow. Nor could he recollect the scent of the seaweed, and the sound of the choir in the church as they practised their carols, wildly careless of tune and time, as they took advantage of the choir-mistress's absence. If so, he could never have left her as he had done.

The eight years had not altered Edith one whit. While she was still at home, the sister who was to have succeeded her in her duties had married, and it was Laura's husband with whom Edith was sitting in the Invalids' Corner, taking Laura's place for the present, as Laura's baby was only about a fortnight old. How could Edith know that Mrs. Priestly was dead, and that the Major's loneliness was due to the fact of his being a widower? How could Major Priestly know that Edith's heart was still his, and that one word from him would suffice

to make her stretch out her hands to him and take back the troth he had broken so many years ago?

As the quick days went on, bringing Christmas nearer and nearer, Edith longed to speak. Major Priestly lay there so lonely—so very, very lonely. No one ever sat by him. No one ever came and asked him how he was. Every morning his servant would arrange the rug and chair in the same unsatisfactory manner, and after turning the newspaper for his master, where only the advertisements were visible, notwithstanding strict orders to the contrary, would disappear, only to return with the mid-day letters. And again, when the sun went down, he would come with the white pony that drew the chair back again to the hotel, where the Major spent long, sad evenings, thinking over the past.

Every word Edith spoke to her companion, that he occasionally overheard, made him more than ever convinced that she was married. And, although at times Dugald Scott had tried to begin a conversation with him, when he was left alone, while Edith sought for shells or tiny very late, or very, very early flowers, that even at Christmas were to be found in the chines. The Major's angry state of mind would not allow him to avail himself of these advances, and he received them so coldly that even Dugald's good-nature would not stand such constant rebuffs, and he soon gave up trying to make the Major speak. Ursa Major, Dugald called him; and Edith would often wince at the descriptions her brother-in-law gave of his sulky companion; and more than once she was going to take him into her confidence, simply as a means of stopping his heedless talk. But the remembrance of the way in which she had been jilted kept her silent, and there seemed small chance of the two lonely souls, who were longing to forgive and be forgiven, ever speaking to each other again: when quite a small thing occurred which might have been a tragedy, and only ended, as things ought to end, in wedding-bells.

The night before Christmas Eve had been terrible. The great north wind had risen when the sun set angrily behind the lovely range of hills to the right of the Invalids' Corner, and came sighing and moaning through the pine trees, that presently began to creak and groan like the masts of a ship at sea. Then a ragged, grey cloud drifted by, and the rain came swirling down through the air: the sea began to roar and lash the cliffs, now foaming at their feet, then rolling in with an angry howl that could be heard all over the town. And in less time than it takes to tell it, the whole atmosphere seemed turned into a battle-field, where the wind and the rain fought and strove together for mastery.

The morning broke peacefully, the blue sky, flecked with puffs of white cloud, looked like April; a late thrush sang lustily, and the robins seemed as vocal as larks. There was no one at all in the Invalids' Corner when the Major's pony arrived there. The damp of the night before was rising from the shore and cliffs, under the warm

sunshine, and was drifting out to sea, where the fishing-boats were dashing past under the fresh breeze, as if in a hurry to make up for lost time.

When the pony was unharnessed, the Major's servant said :

"I must put you a bit further back, sir. These cliffs are like powder, and give directly there's any rain. You might have a nasty fall; for see, sir, the pony's feet have gone right into the mire at the edge."

And so saying, he pushed the chair back into the pine trees and left with the pony, while the Major lay back much inclined to abuse everything, from last night's rain and storm to to-day's sunshine, that seemed to keep everyone in-doors.

It was one of those days when everything seems to go wrong at once: newspapers were late, owing to Christmas; letters were delayed, too; and those that had been delivered were of such a contrary nature that they seemed to make everything even worse than was necessary. The Major had not slept, owing to the storm; and in consequence of his sleepless night felt so ill that he made up his mind he should never walk again, and might as well make his will, and leave a world that had become useless to him, and where he felt he had little enjoyment in store for him.

Then he naturally thought of Christmas, and that aggravated him. A lonely Christmas always does aggravate us, somehow. We think regretfully of the crowded hearth at home, and the many other people who are supposed to be enjoying themselves. There is always a great expectation of something marvellously delightful at Christmas, what we never quite knew; but we do expect it every year, and every year we feel just as disappointed, as we have done ever since the death of the days when the delight took form in the receipt of a new doll or a top, and too much to eat.

The Major had worked himself into a state of savage despair over his different woes, and was almost weeping for sorrow for himself, when he suddenly saw Edith coming towards him. That wretched invalid—as the Major termed poor Mr. Scott—was not with her, and she was walking very slowly, with her mouth set in a determined manner that told anyone who knew her that she had made up her mind to do a disagreeable duty, and that nothing should deter her from doing what she intended. How sweet she looked as she came through the straight, red-stemmed pine-trees, through which the blue sky gleamed and the white clouds seemed to play at hide-and-seek! Then she came out of the pines, and along the edge of the cliff. In one moment the scene had changed. Her foot slipped on the grassy pine-needles blown down by the storm, she threw up her hands, and disappeared on the edge of the cliff that all at once gave way, and crumbling like a piece of sand, turned to go in an avalanche after her.

The Major forgot his illness, forgot everything, save that he loved Edith, and that she was dead; and jumping up from the couch that

for five months he had never left, except to be carried to his sofa or bed, dashed forward at once to rescue his darling's remains, or perish in the attempt.

If he lives to a hundred, he will never forget the moments of agony he spent before he reached the place where Edith had disappeared, and could look over and see where she was. Every cruel word he had ever spoken to her, every syllable of reproach he had poured out on her devoted head came back to him, and he could almost have shrieked aloud to heaven for help, when he suddenly saw Edith's face rising over the cliffs. He stood motionless: then he rushed forward and, without one word, drew her hands in his, and dragged her forcibly up to a level with him. Then he looked over: no harm was done. The soft red earth had crumbled a little and slid a short distance down towards the sea, but in so gentle a decline that a child could not have been hurt in the least, and all Edith had had to do, was to turn, and, with small detriment to anything save her garments, climb back again to terra firma.

"Thank God for the landslip!" said the Major, after the first explanations were over; and Edith having heard all his story and told hers in return, had consented to take up again her twisted threads of life, and make the best of what was left them both. "If it had not been for seeing you go over the cliff, I should never have spoken to you again."

"Oh, yes, you would," said Edith as she shyly took his hand in hers: "for I could not stand the idea of its being Christmas, and you all alone and sad. And when I was coming towards you, I was going slowly in order to make up my mind exactly what to call you. Frank seemed dead to me; Major Priestly was not my old friend; and Francis seemed as if I wanted to be severe—and I did not. I only wanted to make you happy, and see the smile I knew so well return. I forgot everything, Frank, except that I loved you, and that you were in trouble."

And lifting up her face to his, she gave him the first kiss she had given him for eight long, weary years.

Then suddenly down in the valley, the bells began to ring, and the sound came on the breeze through the pine trees, in a measured cadence.

"Good-bye to the Invalids' Corner for me," said the Major. "That wretched doctor would have kept me another month on my back, but you can see for yourself how well I am."

And, indeed, when that "wretched invalid" came out to sit in the sunshine when the mist had disappeared, expecting to find Edith as usual, ready to read to him, he was electrified to see her walking to meet him, leaning lovingly on the strong arm of the other habitué of the Invalids' Corner.

CYRIL TREVOR'S WOOD-NYMPH.

SOME years ago I stood musing on a balcony overlooking the Basse Plante at Pau. I had been spending many months there with my uncle, who required change for his health. But he had grown gradually weaker, and now was scarcely able to return to England and Trevorhurst. The twilight shadows had wrapped the town in night; the afterglow had faded from the lonely west; the mysterious outline of the Château loomed ghost-like through the fragile screen woven by the interlacing trees within the moat; and still I lingered, till the lamps were lighted in the street below—dull globes shining but to make darkness visible. Then I turned slowly away.

Through the window, I saw my Uncle, Lucius Trevor, reclining in an arm-chair before the smouldering logs upon the hearth, with legs outstretched and hands clasped over his waistcoat, forming, with thumbs and little fingers, acute angles, north and south. The resemblance to a benevolent gnome was striking, as the flickering light danced disrespectfully on his bald head, losing itself in the furrows which sprang like gothic arches over his deep-set eyes; but the attitude of repose, the flexible, good-humoured lips, now parted in a genial smile, flatly contradicted the comparison and left no doubt as to the character of the good old gentleman.

"I'm glad you've come in," he commenced, as I sat down. "Cyril, my boy, what do you think of getting married?"

"A proceeding, in the abstract, natural; in particular, unpleasant," I replied. "What has suggested the idea now, sir?"

"My old age, Cyril, and failing health," returned my uncle; "and you are the last of our race. It would be a pity to let the family die out. You ought to marry, Cyril." Up went the eyebrows, and the firelight executed a jig on the tip of his nose.

I groaned. This was an old point of difference between us. I could not recognise in his ardent desire to see me settled in life, any reason for burdening myself with a companion whose sympathies were likely to be at variance with mine. Even the prospect of an heir was not sufficient to lessen the dislike I had conceived towards all of the feminine gender. Allowing that the sentiment was unnatural in a young man, it certainly increased in exact proportion to the eagerness my uncle showed to provide me with a wife against my inclination. Therefore it is not surprising that the impending discussion provoked anything but gratitude in me.

"In my opinion," continued Mr. Trevor, "it isn't good for a young man to wander about the world with plenty of money in his pocket, and no responsibility to steady him. Why don't you choose a pleasant girl to share the cares of Trevorhurst with you, when I am no longer

here? There are as many as one could wish for, even in Pau, my boy."

"Oh, as many and more!" was my cynical response. "Only, preferring to be married for merit rather than money, I should like to know something of the young lady herself, and thanks to folly and fashion that feat is well nigh impossible. Can't we let the subject drop, sir? I am thoroughly tired of it."

"Let it drop?" said my tormentor, rolling his head round to see me better. Then suddenly drawing in his legs, he darted a lean hand sideways in my direction as greater emphasis to his meaning, and recommenced:

"Now, Cyril, just listen. You represent the good of life to me. I took you when your parents died; reared you as my heir—my son; and you have always been a good lad—always. I can't last long—you know I can't. I grow weaker every day. Do me this favour. This one favour. Promise to look seriously about you while we are in Pau. I will not ask you to propose to anyone. No, no! But to please me, to gratify an old man's whim, consider the subject seriously."

"Enough, sir!" I answered, touched by this appeal. "I give you my promise. You deserve far more than that from me. I will think the matter over carefully, and do my best to meet your wishes."

"Thank you, my boy!" exclaimed my uncle, rubbing his hands together. "You always were a good lad; very!"

Nevertheless, I was greatly annoyed.

One afternoon, not many days after the preceding conversation, I strolled across the bridge over the Gave, intending to walk off a fit of ill-humour incident on meeting three fashionable young ladies in the Place Gramont. The day was intensely hot; and in my present state of mind shade became absolutely necessary on advancing into the country. Luckily a little by-path, seeming to invite investigation, enticed me, and taking it, I found it led through a thick plantation, which afforded a grateful relief after the dust and glare of the high road.

Presently, emerging from the wood, the ripple of running water attracted my attention. Following the sound, I arrived at a group of beech trees, and, forcing my way through the underwood, saw a natural basin where the stream had collected into a clear pool a few feet deep. Around the margin ferns and ivy found their way through moss, bending down to admire their grace reflected in the mirror beneath. In the centre there jutted up a fragment of rock, clad with greyish lichen and a few odd rock-ferns which peeped from the narrow fissures in its sides. It was a place for Diana herself to bathe in.

Throwing myself down, I reclined upon a couch of fallen leaves, concealed by the undergrowth, which still permitted me to enjoy the peaceful beauty of the scene. My happiness was complete but not lasting, for at the moment a sweet voice broke the stillness.

"Merrily, merrily shall I live now,
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."

"The nymph of the stream," I murmured. "Here she comes!"

Crish, crackle, swish! The brambles on the other side were parted, and a young girl stood upon the bank. She seemed about seventeen, but well formed for her age. Her feet were concealed by sabots, and she wore a short cloak, like that of a French officer, over her dress. An old hat, which had slipped back during the struggle with the thorns, framed a quaint little face more quaintly still.

"Delicious!" she exclaimed in English, peering eagerly into the green shadows. "How cool the water looks! Oh, dear! How tired I am, and how hot my head and feet are!"

Flinging an armful of ferns on the ground, she seated herself on the brink of the fountain, tapping the surface of the water with the point of her sabot. She was strangely beautiful, but the great soft, brown eyes, fixed dreamily on the surface of the pool, would have redeemed the most irregular features from the charge of ugliness.

"I will!" she suddenly cried. "There is no one here to see, and no one anywhere to care."

I watched her in amused perplexity. The girl pleased me, and the wild, graceful freedom of each motion contrasted agreeably with the studied elegance of polite society.

"What a goose I am," she soliloquised, pausing in the act of throwing off her little sabots, as a slight change of my position rustled the leaves of which my couch was composed. "That is the consequence of unorthodox amusements. Every leaf that stirs must be construed by my guilty conscience into someone looking at me. A pretty sight they would see too! The idea is laughable!"

She took off her hat and let loose a mass of dark curly hair, which floated about her shoulders in picturesque disorder. Then, lying down on the edge of the pool, she stooped over and dipped her face in the water, pouring it with her little hands over the top of her head, till her curls were dripping like a water spaniel; then laughing as she wrung out a shower of diamonds.

At that moment an accident occurred for which I have been thankful ever since. In casting off the sabots, one had fallen dangerously near the edge of the bank, and this, now receiving an impetus from its heedless little owner, quietly slipped into the water, commencing a journey on its own account by jogging over the miniature waves with most prosaic obstinacy. A cry of dismay followed the discovery. What was to be done? The shoe was already out of reach and how could it be recovered? I laughed silently. All trace of my dislike to women had evaporated. I blessed that shoe and waited heartlessly till the sense of loss brought tears into the brown eyes; then softly drawing aside the branches, I stood up and spoke.

"Mademoiselle!" was all I said, though I saw that she was English.

Such a start! Such a blush! It rose over her eyebrows; flooded the sun-burned neck; affected, I verily believe, the tiny feet themselves. Her shyness conquered mine. I longed to set her more at ease.

"Mademoiselle! Pardon me. I would not have presumed to make my presence known, had it not been for this misfortune," said I, respectfully, pointing to the self-constituted boat steadily approaching the centre.

The Nymph hid her face.

"Will you permit me to attempt the rescue?" I persisted, determined to hear her speak.

"Oh sir, have pity! I thought I was alone. If you can assist me, pray do so!" she answered, striving to conceal her tears.

Poor little thing! Decidedly that sabot must be obtained.

"If Mademoiselle would kindly aid me by throwing stones from her side, so as to drive the shoe towards the shore," I suggested, ignoring her distress.

Dashing her hand across her eyes, the girl immediately set about collecting missiles, which were then flung by my directions—at first badly; but, gradually regaining confidence, her aim improved, and, to my great joy, forgetting in the excitement all the disagreeable attendant circumstances, her clear laugh rang through the fragrant air, each peal re-echoing within my heart.

Here was a revelation. In all my life, a perfectly natural girl, at the same time perfectly well bred, had never crossed my path. Hundreds of pretty damsels had walked, danced, and posed before me for the sake of Trevorhurst, but never one whose grace had not been cultivated, made to order; whose smile was not a languid elongation of the lip. On the other hand the frank abruptness of the country lasses was no better; loud voices from charming women jar upon my nerves; so that between this Scylla and Charybdis, I became a man whose books and horses represented to him the only pleasures in life. Now, to upset these crude ideas, came a maiden, with bare feet gleaming through the moss, over whose entire person sweet modesty had thrown her veil. If but the mind equalled the appearance in simplicity, my uncle's wish would not seem so hard to gratify.

Meanwhile, the would-be boat drifted nearer to the land, and having by means of a long stick obtained possession of it, I dried it in my handkerchief before surrendering it to the owner, who dared not raise her eyes to aid her faltering thanks. Feigning not to observe how the sabots were resumed, I occupied myself in gathering up the ferns strewn upon the bank, talking incessantly. I told her how the autumn tints had charmed me, so that town life faded into insignificance before the freedom of the uplands, and as I praised, a bond of sympathy sprang up between us, and we chattered like two old familiar friends.

"Are you an artist?" she asked at length. "I am quite sure that you are English. Besides, you are too—courteous—for a Frenchman."

I laughed. "Thank you. No, I am no artist, except so far as appreciation of beauty can make one. I am—a student of human nature, at present intent on becoming acquainted with the neighbourhood of Pau from a different standpoint to that of the ordinary visitor. Will you help me?"

My companion smiled, complying by describing favourite nooks, hidden, like this fairy pond, from prying curiosity. Leading her on to speak of herself, I learned that her name was Beatrice Ross, that she lived with her father in a villa on the Côteaux, with no other companion than an old housekeeper. Sometimes her only sister came from Pau, where she resided with an aunt, to visit her, but these events were comparatively rare. To our mutual delight, in this sister was a pretext found for our acquaintance. I had often met her at parties, and she had described me to Beatrice as a "woman-hater, but immensely rich."

"I don't know why she called you that," said my Nymph, doubtfully. "You are not unkind to me, but quite the reverse."

"Never judge a man by what you hear," returned I, gravely. "Man is a many-sided animal; gentle to those who treat him well, the opposite when badly managed. He must be humoured, Miss Beatrice. But are you never lonely, separated so much from all society? Do you never wish to be with your sister?"

"No," she answered, quickly. "I am quite happy as I am. Now and then I long to see the beauties of other lands, but that cannot be. And, after all, though nature may look otherwise, she cannot be more beautiful than here."

"You are right," said I; "there may be difference in kind but not of degree."

"So I believe. People often say the Côteaux are disappointing, the Pyrenees not to be compared to other mighty ranges, but the fault, it seems to me, is theirs. If you come to nature," she continued, waving a little hand to illustrate her meaning, "with a fixed idea, there must be a hill here, a fountain there, icebergs glittering in the sunlight yonder, and moss-grown ruins where I stand; of course, one will not always find them. But come to the great earth-mother saying, 'Show me what thou wilt!' And what loveliness she then unfolds! The morning sky of palest yellow, darkest indigo, and clearest rose, so shaded as to be a miracle; no harsh discord, but all a blending harmony; the pure air shaking the dew-drops off the trembling grass; the melody of fifty different birds, and the solemn tremor of the forest trees. At midday, the deep hush of sleep—only the cicala to make the silence felt. At night, the glorious stars and peaceful slumber of the woodlands. Never twice the same!"

As she stood, with hands clasped over the ferns, her eyes, shining with a strange light, fixed on the quivering beeches, I almost

fancied that she saw the earth-mother herself, beckoning from the dim recesses of the whispering shadows, and that, like some heroine of German folk-lore, she was fast losing the consciousness of mortality under the influence of a mystic charm: when unhappily the snap of a dry twig aroused her, and with a gentle dignity she bade me farewell.

"We shall meet again?" I asked, detaining her hand.

"Who can tell?" was the reply, as pushing aside the brambles, with a merry laugh, the wood-nymph vanished out of sight.

I wanted to follow but dared not, retracing instead, the dusty way to Pau, oppressed by a strange sensation of loss, and dizzy with new ideas. Oh, child!—yet no child, but woman in all the depth and tenderness of unsophisticated wisdom—who could have told but yesternight thy lot and mine were interwoven in the weft of time? Ah, that it may not prove a passing golden thread, glittering against the darkness of a lonely life, but that the two may twine together all through the years the future holds concealed!

It was not difficult to interest my uncle in the adventure. The elder Miss Ross had impressed him favourably by her beauty and accomplishments, but he fully approved of my winning a wife whose youthful mind could readily adapt itself to her husband's views and customs. However well Miss Ross might play the lady of the Manor, her younger sister would probably be a better match for me. Then the question arose, how to gain Mr. Ross's consent? Plainly the road to the Villa lay through his sister Madame B——'s drawing-room. My uncle, therefore, proposed calling on her, stating my wishes to see more of her niece, and enlisting her sympathies on my behalf. As the plan seemed feasible, I consented gladly, promising to await the issue with all the patience at my command.

Weeks passed on without visible result. My uncle only responded to my importunities by mysterious nods, or more exasperating proverbs. I wandered all over the country in the hope of meeting Beatrice, returning at close of day more despondent than ever. I haunted the pool, but though the sun-elves played upon the surface, no girlish figure came through the brambles, no sweet voice sang the praises of the wood. Granted that all my attempts began and ended in folly—what will not a man do when he is in love? I grew discontented and peevish, and augmented my private woes by anxiety about my uncle's health, he having caught a cold which he seemed unable to shake off. We did not talk much in those days, we were not sociable companions, he sat on one side of the fire, rolling his head and coughing; I sat on the other, responding by impatient sighs.

One evening, on coming home in a more dejected mood than usual, I was greeted with a volley of chuckles that must have been the death of any other man.

"You seem merry, sir," I remarked crossly, throwing down my hat.

"Very merry!" he replied, rolling his head fearfully. "I think

you need change of air, Cyril. We'll go to Mentone or Rome. They say the climate is more exhilarating and quite as mild as this. What do you say to it?"

"I'm well enough, sir. But all places are alike to me, and I'm quite ready to accompany you anywhere."

"A very proper frame of mind," he chuckled, gathering his legs up sharply and shooting them out again with equal rapidity. "Very good! Then we'll be off next week. By-the-bye, Madame B—— has a party to-night, as you know. She wanted me to go, but I said the night air was too great a risk, and told her I'd send you instead. You'll look in, my boy?"

"Certainly, if you promised, sir," I answered, morosely. "But frankly, I wish you had not done so. I am in no humour for frivolity just now."

"Quite right," coughed my uncle, satirically. "At your advanced age you ought to have done with frivolity. But you'll go, Cyril?"

Accordingly, about half-past eight I presented myself at Madame B——'s. The rooms were full, and, as I paused on the threshold, if my face betrayed my secret feelings, its expression must have been exceedingly ungracious. Madame, however, welcomed me kindly, and after a few words, said:

"You have met my niece before, I understand. Perhaps, however, a more formal introduction would not be out of place. Beatrice, my dear, allow me to present to you Mr. Cyril Trevor."

My head reeled, my heart stopped as, in the radiant being before me, I recognised my long-lost wood nymph.

It is impossible to recal what followed. Everything was enveloped in a rosy haze of blissful incredulity. When I recovered somewhat we were sitting together in a distant part of the room, screened from the public gaze by rows of plants, from which I conclude, that even at that trying moment, my native common-sense had not entirely deserted me.

The time passed with terrible rapidity. Beatrice told me that her aunt had come a few days since to the Villa, and after a long conversation with Mr. Ross, had carried her off to Pau. Making good use of my time, a bond of sympathy was binding us very closely together when Madame at last broke in upon our solitude.

"Really, Mr. Trevor, I cannot permit you to monopolise my niece all the evening. You may call to-morrow if you like, but I must separate you now. Beatrice, Miss Lucy wishes to speak to you about Lady C.'s ball. Are you going, Mr. Trevor?"

"I had not intended accepting the invitation on account of my uncle's health," I replied; "but if Miss Ross will favour me with her hand——" I stopped and looked at Beatrice.

"I am not a good dancer," she said, blushing. "You will be sorry for having asked me, afterwards."

"Never!" I cried, fervently. "Grant my request, and I shall be happy for life."

Madame laughed heartily at my ardour, and having obtained the desired promise, I took my leave.

"Ho! ho!" chuckled my uncle, when I reappeared in his room. "Shall we go to Rome next week, Cyril? Do you want bracing now, my boy?"

"The wind has changed, sir," I answered, gravely. "The journey will scarcely be necessary on my account. Had you any idea that Miss Ross would be at her aunt's to-night, sir?" I enquired.

"Of course I had," chuckled my uncle. "I arranged the whole affair. Got Madame B—— to drive with me to the villa one day, and had a chat with Mr. Ross. The long and short of it is that I obtained his consent to your marriage with his daughter, provided he incurred no trouble or expense in the matter. A selfish old man, Cyril. You do well to take the girl away from his influence. But, my boy," he added, wistfully, "you must have the wedding soon. I can't last much longer."

"Don't, sir, for pity's sake, say so. You'll live for many a long year yet, please God," said I, brokenly.

"Ah, no! My time is almost run," he answered, sadly. "And I should like to see you settled first."

I took advantage of Madame B——'s complaisance, with the result of falling daily deeper in love. Beatrice completely won my uncle's heart, and it was very pretty to see her tender solicitude for him. In due course the day of the ball arrived, and I sent Beatrice a bouquet and wreath of flowers, but as yet I had not dared mention the wedding-day. My uncle had been far from well that day, and towards evening alarming symptoms began to appear. He was very anxious that I should go, however, declaring that he should rest more easily when he knew his dearest hopes were consummated and I was actually married; and grew so excited on perceiving my reluctance to obey, that at last I left the room, pledged to redeem my promise to him before returning home.

Determining only to explain my uncle's danger to Beatrice, and carry back from her a single word for him, I searched the crowded rooms and corridors of Lady C.——'s villa, and at length found her seated in the conservatory, screened by large flowering plants from observation, the very embodiment of melancholy. On seeing me she sprang up hurriedly, a vivid flush dyeing her lovely features. It was not difficult to guess *who* was the object of her contemplations.

"Cyril! I thought you would never come! I even heard some one mention that your uncle was worse, and you would most probably not be able to leave him."

"And was this the cause of your sadness, Beatrice?"

She blushed and looked down, with all the charm of modesty

that had captivated me that very first day I had seen her at the pool. This innate modesty was part of her nature, inseparable as herself, as exquisite as, alas, it has become rare.

Then I told her that my uncle was indeed worse, and thought his end approaching. I added that his only remaining wish on earth was our marriage, and begged Beatrice to name the day. At first she was pale and agitated; but with all her modesty and simplicity there was such an absence of coquetry about her that before many minutes were over she had given me the required promise, and named the day. Then, together, with as much happiness in our hearts probably as was ever given to mortal, we went in search of Madame B——

That good lady was not surprised at the news we brought; but while congratulating me, joined with Beatrice in urging my departure, as my uncle must require my immediate care. In truth, my own eagerness was great to hasten back to him. I bade them both farewell. The servant met me at the door.

"Mr. Trevor is worse, sir," was the news that greeted me. "We were going to send for you. The doctor says there is little hope."

I ran upstairs to his room. The dear old gentleman was struggling hard for breath; but he smiled and tried to speak as I leaned over the bed.

"It is all right, uncle," I said, softly. "Beatrice has promised to be mine in a month from to-day, but sent me back to you the moment she heard of your illness."

He pressed my hand feebly in reply. All through the sorrowful night I sat beside him, distressed at the sight of his sufferings, which he bore so patiently. Towards morning the struggle abated, and he fell into a semi-stupor. How strange life seemed to me during the long hours of that watch! From a sick-bed to a ball; from a proposal to a death! How every act of loving kindness came back to me, as I recalled the years we had spent together, with never an unkind word to mar the memory of the tenderness bestowed on me. And now—just as the great wish of his heart—the only one I had ever evinced reluctance to fulfil was about to be gratified—he might not see the consummation of his hopes! How often it is thus in life!

When the dawn was shining clearly through the curtains he raised himself with my assistance, and, with the ghost of his old quaint smile, he whispered:

"So you're going to be married at last, Cyril, and the old man has not a wish on earth unfulfilled. Farewell, my boy; you have ever been as a son to me, the one bright spot in a lonely life. God bless you, and make you happy! Good-bye, Cyril. Some day we shall wish each other good morning in a happier clime."

Then he fell back as if to sleep—but it was the last long sleep that knows no waking.

A few weeks afterwards there was a very quiet wedding in Pau. I was obliged to return to England, and could not bear to leave my wife behind, so the trousseau was curtailed, and Beatrice came with me to disperse the gloom of Trevorhurst. Years have passed since then, years full of quiet happiness seldom broken by storms; and never once have I regretted meeting my fate among the beeches. The mists are again stealing up the hillsides, as I stand on the same balcony on which this tale commences, looking over the same scene. The sun is once more declining in the west—the Pyrenees seem far, and dim, and cold—too grand to heed the sighing of the breeze that comes from them to me. But they cannot chill the memories that bind us to the past, nor freeze the mingled joy and sadness of those days, when the dear old man, who loved us both, plotted and planned the welfare of my wood-nymph and myself.

A LOVE PLAINT.

Ah, Love! you droop your eyes—and night
Hath shadowed all the way.
You raise the lids—and oh, how bright
Doth shine again the day!

Oh, Love! your cheek is pale—my heart
Is chill as icy rain.
You blush—and lo! how quick will start
The blood thro' nerve and vein.

Ah, Love! you're silent—and the land
Is echoless and still.
You speak—and ever vast and grand
Pours out the song-bird's trill.

Oh, Love! if such the power you wield
On lips, and ear, and heart,
In truth, let pity be my shield
So we may never part!

A. E. G.

M. [illegible]N STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THEY CAME IN, CHARLES CARR AND LETTICE CHATTING GAILY.

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LADY LAURA'S ADVICE.

THE rich golden light of the calm summer evening lay upon Dering as the door of Moorland House was thrown open to admit Dr. Palmer and Charles Carr.

Mr. Carr was shown into a room to wait, while Dr. Palmer hastily made his way to the dining-room, from whence came the sound of voices in commotion. It was Mrs. Grale's cry of distress which he had heard. The news spoken out by the incautious servant—that Mr. Allan's walking-stick had just been discovered by the Black Pool—had startled and partly stunned her. She was lying back on a sofa.

"She must be kept perfectly quiet," observed Dr. Palmer, as he busied himself about her.

That sentence completed Mrs. Grale's present restoration. "No, no, Doctor," she faintly cried. "There has been too much keeping quiet already! I mean to hear what there is to be heard about my poor boy, whom I believe I shall never, never see again."

She burst into a flood of passionate tears and went on with a wail:

"I've had a sort of feeling upon me from the very first that I never should. I did not dare to say it, or they would have scolded me for my fancies! But I felt it. I did—I did!"

"Hush, hush," said Dr. Palmer, soothingly. "If we are to allow you to speak, you must be calm and reasonable."

"Doctor," cried Mrs. Grale, "it's no use your trying to make it less than it is. They have found my poor Alny's stick in the Black Pool."

"There," said Dr. Palmer, "is an exaggeration to begin with. They have found Allan's stick, but not in the Black Pool. It was among the bushes of the woodland round the Pool; it was not in it."

This variation, slight as it was, produced a revulsion of feeling in Mrs. Grale's breast. She laughed hysterically. "That's what

happened to my hamper," she said. And nobody but Mary Anne knew what she meant, for the Doctor had quite forgotten that incident.

Dr. Palmer's quick glance had made him aware of the presence of a stranger; a tall, limp lady, with an aquiline nose and strongly marked eyebrows. Lady Laura Bond had rushed across the hall from the drawing-room, and made herself very useful with her experience and her sal-volatile. Dr. Palmer knew he should not like such a person fussing round himself.

"You had better go to your room," he urged his patient. "You will be more comfortable there, and we will tell you all you wish to know."

"No, no," persisted Mrs. Grale, "tell me at once; here. Everybody may as well hear now that I've never known where my son is, or where he went to. Mr. Grale seemed to know something, and that quieted me; otherwise I could have had no rest."

There ensued a slight rustle in the background. Without a word Lady Laura had gracefully withdrawn. She was not going to intrude and she had heard quite enough. Mary Anne followed her.

"You know you let me believe you understood all about it, Richard," repeated Mrs. Grale, reproachfully. "And if Alny has been lying dead and cold all the time you've been feeling angry with him ——"

Mrs. Grale broke down. Her husband's dark face was darker than Dr. Palmer had ever seen it.

"I knew of sufficient reasons why he might well wish to go for a time," he said, with dogged sternness. "Though some others who ought equally to have gone have enough effrontery to remain."

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Grale, sharply. "Do you mean the Vivians? I don't believe Alny was in anything that the young Vivians were not in also. He had no other friends here."

Mr. Grale looked at the Doctor, and muttered, "Women's random shots hit the truth wonderfully near sometimes."

"But what about the walking-stick?" wailed Mrs. Grale. "Why should Alny have left it lying there? If he drowned himself ——"

"People don't get parcels sent to them after they have drowned themselves, Mary," interrupted her husband, drily.

Mrs. Grale was silent. She thought he alluded to the parcel which had been directed to the station at Corrabuin, and which she believed Allan must himself have fetched away. In that belief might lie consolation. Dr. Palmer spoke up. As yet there could be no certainty about the matter anyway, as to whether Allan was alive or dead; and his kind heart yearned with pity for the poor mother.

"I had come up to tell you about Allan's walking-stick," he said, gently, "and also about something else. Young Carr went over to Sladford to-day, and heard that your son had been seen there the

evening that he left home, or the next evening. You know, Mr. Grale, I told you I was nearly sure I had seen Allan in the Carstow Road that night. And the Carstow Road leads to Sladford."

"What! Did you go cross-questioning everybody about your own son, Richard, while making me, his mother, believe that you knew nothing?" cried Mrs. Grale, who was in that uneasy frame of mind that makes us cavil at anything.

"You see, Mr. Grale thought he knew why Allan had gone, but he did not know when or how he went," explained the Doctor, gently, apologising for Mr. Grale, who sat aside, dark and dumb. "And, my dear lady, I am not exactly 'everybody'—Mr. Grale places confidence in me."

"I had a right to his confidence too," cried Mrs. Grale. "And so you thought you saw Allan leaving Dering, and told my husband of it," she went on. "Why need he have hidden that? It would have been the greatest comfort to me."

"I believed Dr. Palmer was mistaken," said Mr. Grale. "You know you did not feel sure, Doctor: and you said the person you saw wore no overcoat."

"No," said the Doctor, "he did not wear one."

"Allan had his overcoat with him," returned Mr. Grale. "These people in Sladford, that you speak of, Doctor—did they know him well? Did they talk with him?"

Dr. Palmer answered rather reluctantly: he was not feeling sure himself. "It was Mark Acland who saw him. At least, saw someone that he thought was Allan. He only spoke to him as an ordinary customer in the shop; he could not think where he had known his face; it was only afterwards that he remembered, or fancied he remembered, whose it was."

"Not very good evidence," said Mr. Grale, decisively.

"That box at Corrabuin—it has always seemed to me to be our best chance of hearing of him. If only we knew where it came from!" interposed Mrs. Grale.

"I do know," replied her husband, shortly. And Dr. Palmer was almost startled by the abruptness of this declaration.

"Do you know what was in it?" asked Mrs. Grale, bewildered.

"I do," he said again, with equal curtness.

"Oh, Richard! Do you know where it is now?—or what became of it?" she enquired again, her voice rising to a piteous wail.

Mr. Grale hesitated a moment. "I know that Allan has not got it," he said, slowly.

Mrs. Grale fell back on the sofa and buried her face in the pillows. "My boy is dead!" she sobbed.

"You must not even think such things," said Dr. Palmer, "without better evidence. He may be alive and quite well."

"I am to be kept in the dark," she wept. "You may find out this, and you may find out that, and you may tell each other—but I

shall never know, except by some chance, like to-night's. I have more right to know than anyone else has: is he not my son?"

Her husband made a little, deprecating shrug. Perhaps he, better than anybody else, could understand the agony of despair which was giving her this novel courage. "I did not tell you everything at first, Polly," he said, in his kindlier manner, "because I expected we should hear something of Allan soon enough, and I wanted to spare you what I thought would be only a few days of needless anxiety. In that case, if Allan had come to his right mind, he himself would have thanked me for my silence. I would have told you all had I known how the uncertainty was to be prolonged."

"I know there's nothing but the worst to hear," sobbed Mrs. Grale. "Why should my sister Marget be always haunted by those dreams?—up to this very hour!—and Alny is always in them with a white, despairing face!"

"Anyway, we must try and see what we can find out now," spoke her husband. "I think Edgar Vivian could tell something—and I shall at once go to him. Dr. Palmer will go with me."

Mrs. Grale started forward. "Did Allan meet him that night at the Black Pool?" she cried. "There was the note, you remember, that we found in Allan's room. Didn't I say the Vivians were sure to be in it? Women are a vast deal sharper than men, if only men would not put them on false scents. Richard," she continued, with sudden calmness, after a pause, her tone entirely changing, "can the two young men have quarrelled, and ——"

She would not speak the concluding words. Dr. Palmer felt a chill run over him.

"Still there's that box," she mused, rallying a little. "Allan must have sent it to Corrabuin to wait for him after he left home."

"No, no," said Mr. Grale. "Edgar Vivian sent that box. He must have been taking charge of it for Allan."

Mrs. Grale looked from one to the other. She did not understand.

"I suppose he must have had a letter from Allan asking him to send the box on to Scotland," explained Mr. Grale. "I have never had any doubt of that, Mary."

"Have you *seen* the letter, Richard?" she asked, her tone low, shrinking, terrible. It was hard to believe it came from genial, easy-going Mrs. Grale.

"Not yet," answered her husband, almost reluctantly.

"And you never will!" she replied with energy. "Don't you see how it is? Edgar Vivian wanted to get rid of the box somehow—after the quarrel—and the—the ——"

What awful word would she have spoken, had not something in Dr. Palmer's face checked her? It was a look of horror, startled horror; but in a moment it was gone.

"I expect we shall see that letter to-night, Mrs. Grale, and probably we shall get much more than mere negative news. I cannot

believe ill of Edgar Vivian," added the Doctor. "It seems impossible that I can have been so entirely mistaken in him."

"We do find ourselves mistaken in people sometimes," said Mr. Grale, in an undertone. "Strangely so."

They turned to leave the room on their way to Dering Court, to seek Edgar Vivian. Mr. Grale stood for a moment before his wife.

"Polly," he said, in a gentle tone, "you have been blaming me in your mind unnecessarily. I have good reason for thinking that Alny went away for his own purposes and that he is staying away for them. If I were to tell you all—which I don't do only because it would worry you—you would think so too. Take heart: I don't believe any harm has happened to him."

And Mr. Grale stooped and kissed her.

"We will send Mary Anne to her mother," he said to the Doctor.

Lady Laura Bond and Miss Grale were standing in the bay window of the drawing-room, close together, talking earnestly. Mr. Grale, apologising, told Mary Anne she must go to her sick mother.

"Indeed, yes; and I am going away at once, or I shall not reach home before dark," said Lady Laura. "But I will say good-bye to your mother first, my dear," she added to Mary Anne, as the gentlemen went out. They took Charles Carr with them, who had been patiently waiting; and Mr. Grale questioned him as to the details of what he had heard from Mark Acland at Sladford.

Lady Laura Bond stole to Mrs. Grale's side. No other word would describe her entrance. She crept into the dining-room, her supple form looking more willowy than ever, as if she was wending her way in and out among intangible and mysterious obstacles. She felt that Mrs. Grale would be repelled by any polite ignoring of family disgrace and trouble: for her, it must be lifted at once into the realms of tragedy. And Lady Laura not only understood what consolation would be acceptable, but could render it.

"My darling! my poor agonized mother-heart!" she exclaimed, bending over Mrs. Grale, and taking both her hands in hers.

"Ah, Lady Laura! you can't think what it is!" sighed Mrs. Grale, lifting her swimming eyes.

"Can't I?" returned Lady Laura, her tone intended to remind Mrs. Grale that her ladyship was a most unhappy wife and mother, living apart from her husband, who doggedly withheld from her the companionship of her child. Nobody ever knew exactly what the story meant, but everybody said that if there had been anything really wrong, be sure Mr. Bond would have applied for a divorce—men never failed to do that! Very few people had ever seen Mr. Bond, and the current opinion was that he was a brute and his charming wife an ill-used woman.

One of Lady Laura's great charms was that she never spoke about her woes to her friends. She gave them eyes; she gave them tones; but she never gave them words.

"Can't I?" she repeated; and stood holding Mrs. Grale's hands, and gazing out upon the trees in the last golden ray of the sunset. "Can't I? No, perhaps I can't."

"Ah, you can, you dear patient angel," cried Mrs. Grale, rousing herself. "But, then, how you do bear on is always a miracle to me. I could not do it."

"We can do what we must," said Lady Laura, again gazing outwards.

"Ah, well—perhaps," admitted Mrs. Grale, flurried; for she thought by the look on Mary Anne's face that, perhaps, she was going too far in freedom with her ladyship. "It's when one does not know what it is one must bear that is the worst of all! It's not knowing what is going to happen next, or even which way to look for it—that is more than I can endure."

"My dear Mrs. Grale," whispered Lady Laura, gracefully sinking upon the sofa beside her, "if you really wish to get some information—or some sort of foreshadowing—some idea of what you have to hope or to fear, why don't you apply to a medium?"

Mrs. Grale's eyes and mouth opened. "What, a spirit-rapper?" she cried.

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Mary Anne, deprecatingly.

"Hush, dear," said Lady Laura; "I can understand your mamma's prejudices. All the uninitiated have prejudices: I had them myself. They are soon dispelled by knowledge."

"I'm sure I know very little of the subject," said Mary Anne. "Nothing except what you have told me."

"Yes, dear," said Lady Laura, turning to Mrs. Grale, "I mean what you mean by a spirit-rapper; but then I mean something very different from what is in your mind. Why!—you are a Scotchwoman—you must believe in second-sight?"

"Mamma believes in a great many mysterious things," asserted Mary Anne. Now that she found her mother's old world superstitions flourishing on fashionable ground, she was content to forego her former ridicule of them.

"I have always known there must be something in second-sight, and in dreams and warnings," admitted Mrs. Grale; "but they are very different from spirit-rappings."

"Very different," assented Lady Laura, with her gracious little laugh: "as different as wild flowers, springing up one knows not how or where, are different from the cultivated blossoms of garden and greenhouse. We have a kind of philosophy of these things now—almost a science!"

"I don't know anything about philosophy, or science either," said poor Mrs. Grale.

"You know only a warm, loving heart and a faith that could move mountains," whispered Lady Laura, tenderly squeezing Mrs. Grale's hand. "How I wish you could see our gifted Bessie Tempest! She

would rejoice to work for you. She has done so much for poor Lady Hill-Forrest."

"Why, what was the matter with her?" asked Mrs. Grale, almost suspiciously.

"Ah, poor dear!—a sad tragedy. But Bessie brought her such beautiful messages. And as for the wonders Bessie worked in the Earl of Dunster's house—of course, one cannot relate them without telling things which must not be spoken of outside a family circle. In a word, dear Mrs. Grale, I don't hesitate to say that Bessie Tempest would be able to tell you all about your dear son, wherever he is or whatever has happened."

Mrs. Grale hesitated. "I'm afraid Mr. Grale would say it was all nonsense," said she, beginning, however, to long after these revelations.

"Need he know it—at first?" murmured Lady Laura. "Could you not meet Bessie Tempest at my house?"

"Oh, yes—if we might," said Mary Anne, impulsively.

Lady Laura sighed, and shook her head. "If I *could* manage it!" she breathed. "Dear Bessie Tempest makes me a great pet. All the messages she brings me from the spirits begin 'White Dove.' I tell her that it is only because the spirits know she likes to spoil me. But Bessie is very particular. She does not like to meet members of any family whose head objects to her; she says the want of harmony tries her. She perhaps might do it as an act of spiritual charity—yet I doubt if she would. Certainly I cannot promise."

"I would not have it if she would," remarked Mrs. Grale, with decision. "I'm not going to enter upon any underhand work."

"How Bessie would like to hear you speak," said Lady Laura, with enthusiasm. 'Dear Mrs. Grale,' she would say; 'here is one of those whose intuitions are right.'"

"I own I should like to see the young lady," admitted Mrs. Grale. "It seems a nicer and quieter way of finding out things than by the detective police."

Lady Laura gave her head a meditative little shake. "The detective police themselves would be only too glad to employ the services of Bessie Tempest. When her gift was first discovered, some detectives came to her; but now that she has realised her position, she takes care to keep aloof from any such people."

"Do you think—if I could get Mr. Grale to consent—that she would come here?" asked Mrs. Grale of Lady Laura.

"She is very much taken up with the Dunsters just now," replied her ladyship. "But you know you may command my influence with her, dear Mrs. Grale."

"I don't believe papa will raise any obstacle at all," remarked Mary Anne; "I can't imagine why mamma should think he will." Mary Anne was longing for an interview with Miss Bessie Tempest. If that gifted personage could find out one mystery, she might find out

another, and Mary Anne was quite sure there was something mysterious about George Vivian.

"I will write to Miss Tempest," said Lady Laura, "and tell her that she must hold herself at my disposal, for a work of love and mercy, on any sudden notice that I may give her."

"But you must not tell her anything—you must not give her any clue," observed Mrs. Grale, suspiciously.

"My dear lady, you, as yet uninitiated, cannot realise how careful we are on that score. In the interests of scientific investigation, we observe precautions which you would never dream of. Yet there's little need: the revelations imparted to these mediums from the spirit-world are wonderful."

"I think I shall be frightened," said Mrs. Grale. "Still"—her old Scotch caution making itself heard—"after all, whatever is said may not be true."

"Of course not," observed Lady Laura, "dear Bessie herself is the first to admit that. 'The spirits are not popes,' she says in her pretty way; 'they do not claim to be infallible.' Bessie may not be able to tell you anything you do not know already, Mrs. Grale, or she may tell you a great deal."

And, with that, Lady Laura Bond wished her friends adieu, and went out to her waiting fly.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LETTER THAT WAS NOT FOUND.

THE latest lingering glory had faded from the western sky when Dr. Palmer and Mr. Grale reached the Court. Charles Carr had left them at the lodge gates, going back again himself.

They asked for Mr. Edgar Vivian, and were shown into the drawing-room. The ordinary enquiry, the ordinary servant's civility, the ordinary aspect of the grand apartment all struck the Doctor with a sense of ghastly contrast to the object of their visit and its possibilities. From the window, he looked out on the darkening sky, the pale line of light on the horizon fading fast—as fast, thought the Doctor, as human hopes or human promises. For Nature's language is catholic, and answers every heart according to itself. But Dr. Palmer was not long allowed to enjoy his silent sympathy: the door opened and Edgar entered.

It appeared that the Doctor would have to open the conversation. He noticed that neither Mr. Grale nor Edgar seemed to dream of shaking hands. So Dr. Palmer hurriedly explained.

"I told you, Mr. Edgar, long ago, that I thought Mr. Grale would some day seek an interview with you. He has come at last. He wishes to hear all you can tell him of his son, for there is great anxiety setting in about Allan now."

Edgar Vivian answered not a word; but he turned towards the manufacturer, as if to indicate "I am ready."

"You called on my son the day that he went away, I believe," began Mr. Grale, rather huskily.

"I called on him one day about that time," replied young Vivian. "I do not know if it was the day he went away. He was not at home, and I did not see him."

"And you left a note for him?"

"Yes. I wrote it in your hall, and left it with the maid."

"Do you remember the date?" asked Dr. Palmer.

"I believe it was the twentieth of October."

"Did you date your note?"

Edgar Vivian smiled faintly. "I do not remember," he replied.

"You did not date it," interposed Mr. Grale, with some emphasis. "The note contained a request that Allan would meet you at the Black Pool. I understand you say that appointment was not kept."

"No, it was not," said Edgar, speaking rather abruptly, as if not much caring to answer. "I did not see your son at all, sir, after I left that note for him at your house."

"Can you remember anything connected with your call when you left the note?" argued the Doctor. "Tell us any little detail, however unimportant it may seem to you."

Apparently with ready compliance, Edgar Vivian bent his head, as one is apt to do when trying to recall past facts to the memory. "The maid told me Mr. Allan had but just gone out. She thought he might be gone to Dr. Palmer's. A small parcel, addressed to Mr. Charles Carr, had been lying on the hall-table all the afternoon, she said, and as it was no longer there, she thought Mr. Allan might be taking it to him."

This was news to Dr. Palmer. "Dear me!" he said, "I have never heard anything of this. If Charles Carr had had any communication with Allan that day, I am sure he would have mentioned it to me."

Edgar sat silent. Fully detailed as were his answers, there was a want of candour in his manner. He waited for questions.

"These are minor details, and may be left," said Mr. Grale, his tone a stern one. "I was given to understand, Mr. Edgar Vivian, that you received a letter from my son after he left home. Can you tell me whence it was written, and what its date was?"

Again Edgar Vivian bent his head, as if considering his answer.

"Yes, I did receive one from him," he at length said. "It was dated Glasgow; the—I think—the twenty-fifth of October."

"And with what object was it written?"

"It was—it was—asking me to forward to a certain address something that I held of his," replied Edgar, with the hesitating air of one who is in doubt whether he ought to speak or not.

"That is, asking you to send to the station, at Corrabuin, a certain box which you had in your charge?" spoke Mr. Grale.

"Yes, sir; that is so."

"How long had you been taking charge of the box?"

"Allan brought it to me on the very day my uncle was taken ill. He also brought me, at the same time, a loan of fifty pounds, which I had asked him for." Edgar spoke slowly and with emphasis, and this time he looked Mr. Grale straight in the face.

"Dr. Palmer tells me you never asked for any further loan. Is that so?"

"Certainly I did not," replied Edgar. "I should never have thought of asking for that loan, had I dreamed you were to be troubled for it, Mr. Grale. I thought it lay between Allan and me—as friends."

"I have a letter asking for a second loan, addressed to myself, and purporting to come from you," said Mr. Grale.

"I never wrote it," answered Edgar.

Mr. Grale shook his head. "We have your note to Allan, written in my hall, and your label on the Corrabuin box with which to compare it."

"I cannot help that—I did not write it," returned Edgar, his tone sounding reckless, as that of one turned at bay.

Mr. Grale threw himself back in his chair. He believed it to be an untruth. "Have you had any further communication from my son?"

"No, sir, I have not. None whatever."

"Well, now, Edgar Vivian, what is there in this that you have now said, which prevented your saying it at the time?" spoke Dr. Palmer, quite sternly. "Could Mrs. Grale have been told that you had heard from her son from Glasgow subsequent to his mysterious departure from home, it would have seemed to her as a solace from Heaven."

"The reason was that—that ——" he was hesitating again. "The reason I could not speak," he went on rapidly, "was that Allan charged me in the note, most earnestly and solemnly, not to disclose to any human being that I had heard from him."

"*Did* you receive any such note from him?" asked Mr. Grale, gazing in the young man's face; "any note at all?"

"I did, sir," was the angry answer.

"Have you any objection to show it to me?"

"I suppose there can be no objection, as you appear to know so much," said Edgar, haughtily. He rang the bell; and, when Stephen appeared, directed him to go to his room and bring down his inlaid writing-desk. "Not my large writing-desk, Stephen, the little one," he added, to the man.

Stephen brought back the desk, and set it on the table. Edgar took his keys from his pocket and unlocked it.

He lifted a few papers from the top, and laid them aside. Then he took out some letters and looked through them. He looked through every letter and paper in the desk, without appearing to find the right one. Then he looked through them all again, more minutely. His

face flushed painfully as he turned to the two gentlemen sitting by and watching him.

"This is very strange," he cried. "I cannot find the letter."

Contempt sat on Mr. Grale's stern face. Dr. Palmer spoke.

"You mentioned another desk to Stephen; a larger one. Perhaps you put it in that one."

"No, no, Doctor, that is my old school desk; nothing of consequence is ever put into that; it is not kept locked," said Edgar, with some emotion, as he still kept nervously opening and re-closing papers. "What can have become of it? I certainly thought I put it in here."

He laid hold of the desk, turned it upside down, and shook it; but nothing more fell out.

"Here's a letter of the same date," he remarked. "I must surely have put this here in mistake for the other, for this is one that should not have been kept at all—a mere note from a tradesman, see!"

He held it towards Dr. Palmer. It was a tailor's request for a postponement of the fulfilment of a little order, on account of great pressure of work—certainly not an epistle to be treasured up.

"I don't think there is anything more to be said," stiffly observed Mr. Grale, rising.

"Mr. Grale," said the young man, "I see what you think—that I am purposely keeping back the note. I assure you it is not so. I thought it was here—and you should have been welcome to read it."

"No," said Mr. Grale, curtly, "I am not thinking that you are keeping the note back. Are you ready, Dr. Palmer?"

Dr. Palmer was dissatisfied with young Vivian's manner. It was not the natural manner of one anxious to tell all he knows, fears, or suspects. Yet it was impossible for the Doctor to give up all his faith in his old favourite. He would not even own to himself that it was shaking at its foundation.

"Is there not anything more you can tell us, Edgar?" he stayed to say. "Are you aware that Allan's walking-stick has been found this afternoon near the Black Pool? You may imagine what that means to his friends. There is no longer room for any false notions of loyalty to false friendship. Allan could never wish his parents to be subjected to a cruel anxiety if you can put an end to it."

Edgar Vivian recoiled. He had not heard the news. "By the Black Pool!" he exclaimed. "What does that mean? Why Maria —Maria ——"

"Yes," said Dr. Palmer, "it will alarm your sister. I know that she has had curious fears and fancies. You had better keep it from her at present—if that shall be possible."

Of course Edgar Vivian discerned the kind of fear that was cropping up of the Black Pool—that he was lying in its waters.

"I cannot think it," he said, with what looked like very genuine earnestness. "I believe that Allan must have got away from the

neighbourhood. Will you tell me one thing, Mr. Grale: what became of the box I sent to Corrabuin?"

"I will," replied Mr. Grale, harshly. "I have it."

"Then possibly you know what it contains, sir. I never did."

The assertion struck bitterly on Mr. Grale's mind. "I dare say!" he ejaculated.

"But if I had known earlier things concerning Allan which I began to suspect later," pursued Edgar, "no box of his should have ever been in my possession."

Mr. Grale's face turned livid with anger. "What do you know, or suspect?" he cried. "Unless you know what is in that box, or unless you have been mixed up with other things of which a guilty knowledge would put you in a felon's dock? Unless you do, I say, you can know nothing: and if you do, then hold your peace, and I will hold mine, if I may. My son may be dead—leave him his character. Surely he has paid dearly enough for the past, when he has paid with his life—his very life—while you will go free and unscathed!"

Edgar Vivian was trembling from head to foot. The hand on which Dr. Palmer laid his own, was deathly cold.

"Have you nothing to say?" whispered the Doctor. But it was too late. Mr. Grale's heavy footsteps were crossing the hall.

"The truth, the truth, Edgar! Speak it."

"Dr. Palmer," was the agitated answer, "I have said nothing but the truth."

"Perhaps not all of it," thought the Doctor, as he hastened after Mr. Grale, and overtook him at the foot of the outer steps. "Perhaps not all of it."

"He never had that letter from Glasgow," affirmed Mr. Grale, taking his friend's arm, as if he felt the need of its support. "He says it for a blind. He got afraid to have anything of Allan's in his possession, and so packed the box off to the first place that came into his head."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. GRALE'S VISIT.

Mrs. Grale did not succumb so utterly as might have been expected to the gloomy cloud which seemed to be settling on Moorland House. Over and over again her husband assured her that there were good reasons why their son should have gone away and be keeping away. He told her, though he did not say that he did not believe it absolutely himself, that Edgar Vivian had received a letter from Allan written at Glasgow a few days subsequent to his leaving home; in which letter he had requested Edgar to send the box to Corrabuin, there to wait until he fetched it away. Thus the keenest edge of agonised suspicion

was softened, and the poor mother began to hope again that her son might be alive and safe.

Mrs. Grale and Mary Anne lost no time in confiding to Mr. Grale the suggestion of Lady Laura Bond—that of employing a medium. Mary Anne proved right in her belief that her father would not pooh-pooh the idea. Mr. Grale was no more a sceptic in the unseen than he was in religion, but he cared for none of these mystical things. He laughed at ghosts, visions, presentiments, and the like, much as he would have laughed at romance, poetry or martyrdom. Nevertheless, when the laugh was done, he would narrate, as most of us do, one or two "queer things" he knew, "quite true and quite unaccountable," and very angry would he be if anybody seemed to doubt his assurances of their having happened, or tried to account for his incidents as commonplace matter-of-fact.

Besides, Mr. Grale's own mind was in truth cruelly exercised, though he hid his doubts and trouble from the world. Was his son alive, or was his son dead? To be set at rest on this point he would have given much; and it may be, a half idea crossed him that a "medium" could do it.

But—though Mr. Grale did not laugh to scorn the proposal of consulting one, he yet gave no sign that he would accede to it. There seemed to be some serious objection in his mind; his daughter thought so. The discussion ended by his saying that he would himself go over, and discuss the matter with Lady Laura Bond.

Lady Laura marvelled within herself when the manufacturer's card was brought to her. In a moment she guessed what it was that he had come about, and she guessed that he was favourably inclined thereto: for no man, in her experience, had ever taken a long drive on purpose to contradict or deny her wishes. Her wishes had been crossed often enough, but people had gone out of her reach to thwart her.

So she went down to receive her visitor, and placed him in the snuggest chair (her drawing-room was full of snug chairs), and enquired after his wife and daughter, and showed no sign of any consciousness of aught deeper than an ordinary call, except by the extreme quietness of her manner, and the almost caressing softness of her tones.

"Lady Laura," he said, abruptly, after a moment's pause, "my wife tells me that you have spoken to her of a way by which—by which matters hidden from common knowledge may have some light thrown upon them."

"Ah, dear Mr. Grale, yes; we were talking," said Lady Laura, sweetly. "I think you must be troubled at not getting news about your poor boy. Have you employed the detective police?"

"I don't think much of the detective police, madam," observed Mr. Grale, looking round, and wondering whether it was the aroma of aristocracy which gave a charm to the cheap chintzes and common plants of Lady Laura's room, such as entirely eluded the solid

grandeurs and hothouse glories of his own establishment. "They stir up a lot of dirty water, and rarely do any good at last."

"Most graphically put, and most true," said Lady Laura, with effusion. "Now that's just what I want to spare poor Mrs. Grale. I know what sad lines there are in family tragedies, Mr. Grale." She looked at him with her lustrous dark eyes, and Mr. Grale thought that fellow, Bond, deserved to be kicked.

"What you suggested to Mrs. Grale was, I think, that she should consult a medium."

"Yes," said Lady Laura. "And if you and dear Mrs. Grale will only do so, I can at least say that it will be a chance. One can promise nothing: the matter does not lie in their hands, you know."

"But they—what do you call them—the spirits?—would know, would they not, if anything *is* wrong, and might they not tell it?—the sort of thing one wouldn't like told?" added Mr. Grale, bending forward in his eagerness for an answer. "I have read queer stories of their power."

"The dear spirits," said Lady Laura, "are tender to human weaknesses and follies; and tender—oh, how tender!—to human feelings! If you have a sore place in your heart, Mr. Grale, which it is necessary for them to touch, they will do it so gently and carefully. And their touch will bring healing with it, dear Mr. Grale."

"Yes, madam; but the question is—if they know any bad news, will they tell that?" asked the matter-of-fact manufacturer.

Lady Laura paused. "How good you are, Mr. Grale! I don't believe my dear Bessie Tempest ever had a sitter whom she would more desire to serve. If there is anything she *can* be permitted—permitted by the spirits—to reveal to you and your friends, rely upon it she will do so."

Mr. Grale was rather taken aback. "I was not thinking of friends," he said. "I was thinking of myself and my poor wife. There are some little matters about our son which I've kept to myself. You're a woman of the world, Lady Laura, and you will know there are some things that it is best a mother should not hear."

"Ah," murmured Lady Laura, catching back a sigh, "happy are those who have such a screen between them and the cruel truth!"

"And if anything went wrong with Allan—if he had any private trouble before he went away that he kept from his mother, why then I should like it to be, if possible, always kept from her," pursued Mr. Grale. "Now, would a medium be likely to speak of that? If so, I will not let my wife meet one."

"You can trust *this* medium, Mr. Grale. The moment you see Bessie Tempest, you will see that she never could or would be made the agent for wounding a mother's heart. But, my dear sir, if it is to be a small family sitting, we must take care that the very intensity of your feelings and longings does not spoil all! Lord Dunster never had a merely family sitting: delicate as was the position of his affairs,

he invited friends—confidential friends, of course—and *trusted* to the spirits not to fail him. They never did."

Mr. Grale paused. "If you consider it would be best to have another or two present, Lady Laura," he said, "we can easily ask some one or other. I would ask Dr. Palmer."

"That delightful doctor who is attending Mrs. Grale? The very thing. We like to bring our subject before scientific men. And he has daughters—very nice girls. And then there are your friends at the Court."

She had heard much of the Vivians from Mary Anne. She might have also heard something from Viscount Rockford and Lord Pelerin.

"But it is not for me to suggest," she resumed. "That lies with yourself, dear Mr. Grale. And we must not have anyone antagonistic at these meetings, or all is ruined."

"The General and his niece are ill," observed Mr. Grale. "If I had anyone from the Court, it would be George —— Mr. Vivian. He is a nice fellow, and we all like him. But now," he continued, after a pause, "will your ladyship pardon me if I put to you the chief question which I came here to put?"

He looked at her intently for a moment. Lady Laura, inwardly wondering, looked at him.

"I think you will deal frankly with me, Lady Laura?"

"Why, my dear sir, how can you doubt it?"

"Well, then —— do you truly believe these mediums have any such power? I mean the power of discerning things which they assume to have, but which is not possessed by ordinary people. Or do you think it is a sham altogether, put on to serve their own interests?"

"Their own interests?" gasped Lady Laura, her eyes and face presenting one perplexed stare.

"Is it merely assumed to gull the credulous public and put money into their own pockets?" continued the plain-speaking man of business.

Her ladyship gave vent to a frightened little scream and flung her hands over her face.

"Oh, Mr. Grale! Oh, dear, dear Mr. Grale! If you only knew how true and earnest they are!—how single-minded my dear Miss Bessie Tempest is! Pray dismiss the thought!"

"Then ——"

"A moment yet, dear sir; let me say just a word. There may be a few such wicked impostors as you speak of, for the world abounds in such; nobody is safe from them: but oh, dear Mr. Grale, do not, pray, confound them with the true mediums who have been, for the helpful purpose of aiding their fellow creatures, so highly favoured. You may trust Bessie Tempest as you would trust me."

"Very well—and I thank you, madam, for answering me candidly, and for setting my doubts at rest," said the good man. "Then we will arrange for the séance—that is what it is called, I believe. I should

like it to be at my own house. Mary Anne said something about your ladyship's; but we will not so far trouble you."

"At your own house certainly, dear Mr. Grale. You must let the medium see and touch that walking-stick," she said, dropping her voice to a whisper. "A *rapport* is of great assistance to them."

Mr. Grale listened and nodded, probably the more impressed the less he understood. "There is another walking-stick concerned; at least, that may have been concerned," he said. "Ought that one to be present also, Lady Laura."

"Yes," she answered, "and also any other articles at hand. Sometimes things are strangely asked for after the medium has passed into the trance. I will write to Miss Tempest to come here the day after to-morrow, and will drive her over to Moorland House the following afternoon. That will be Saturday: shall we say Saturday evening for the séance?—the soft summer twilight is always propitious to these meetings."

"They sometimes take place in pitch darkness, don't they?"

Lady Laura laughed lightly. "Darkness is sometimes necessary, I believe, but very seldom. I do hope, dear Mr. Grale, that you will be satisfied in all ways. There will be a handsome cheque to pay to Miss Tempest, if successful," she added with deprecation. "She is coming from a distance to oblige us, you see.

"Of course, of course; I quite understand that," readily responded Mr. Grale in a hearty tone.

Declining the offer of refreshment, Mr. Grale rose to leave. Lady Laura accompanied him across the hall, and shook hands with him at the door, all in a homely comfortable fashion—which quite impressed the homely man. She stepped outside and stood there talking with him for a minute or two. His mail phaeton—for Mr. Grale kept one, and had driven over in it—was pacing about, waiting for him. At that moment the dreadful butcher was leaving a joint at the side-gate. He and the grocer were both dunning her ladyship for money. The sight of her intimacy with the rich and respected manufacturer would not make them more impatient to be settled with.

That evening Mr. Grale called at Dr. Palmer's. He explained to him what was in contemplation, and asked the Doctor to be present.

"I have always had my doubts—nay, more than doubts," observed Mr. Grale. "I don't fully believe now, though Lady Laura has done her best to convince me. What is your opinion, my friend?"

But Dr. Palmer did not give one. He had heard curious things stated, but he had not followed them himself. "It is hard to believe that these wonders, revelations as they call them, can be pumped up at a given hour of a given day, at a given place by a given person," he said. I am more inclined to believe in the little intuitions which flash in and out of daily life, and come on the very lines which would discredit them with many people—the lines of strong feeling—of love, or hate, or hope, or fear."

Dr. Palmer undertook to see that the walking-stick in possession of Mark Acland should be brought from Sladford for the meeting. And, when Mr. Grale was taking leave, he suddenly asked him whether he happened to have with him the Corrabuin label, and those two notes—the one asking for money and the other making the appointment—which were believed to have been written by Edgar Vivian. Yes, Mr. Grale had them; he kept them in his pocket book, which never left his person by day and was put under his pillow at night.

"As a great favour, Mr. Grale," said the Doctor, "I ask you to leave that label and those notes here for to-night. I wish to make them the subject of—an especial study."

Mr. Grale had no objection. When he was gone, Dr. Palmer sat down and waited for the return of his young people, who were out. They came in, Charles Carr and Lettice chatting gaily. Calling Agnes to him, the Doctor went with her into the laboratory.

"Agnes," said he, "I want your help in a little experiment: something which came into my head while you were all out."

Agnes had helped her father with many a little experiment. He took his loose buttons and his torn gloves to Lettice; but he always called Agnes for his experiments.

"Very well, papa," she answered, delighted. "What am I to do first?"

"You are to let me bandage your eyes," he said, suiting the action to the word; "and then you are to try to answer questions I shall ask about some things I shall put into your hands."

"Why, this is like witchcraft," she observed laughingly, as she submitted. "Suppose I cannot answer at all, papa?"

"Then, don't try to," he replied; "your inability or ability is part of the experiment. Sit down, child; be quite at your ease."

As she obeyed, he placed in her hands the note Edgar Vivian had written asking young Grale to meet him at the Black Pool.

"What is that?" he asked.

"A piece of paper," she answered, still laughing. "It seems to have been twisted like a note. This does not seem very difficult, papa!"

He put into her hands the label, taken from the box, sent to Corrabuin. She lingered longer over that. It was thin paper and had suffered somewhat in its journeyings and its removal. It seemed to puzzle her a little.

"Surely this is paper too!" she said. "I think there is writing on it. It isn't the back of the envelope belonging to the note, is it? No, no—that note was twisted, so that it didn't need an envelope. But I think this piece of paper has something to do with that note."

A gleam of satisfaction passed over Dr. Palmer's face. He took the label from her, and placed in her hands that other note, apparently in the same handwriting, which had asked Mr. Grale for the loan of fifty pounds.

"Now, what about this?" he said, cheerfully.

"Oh! how queer!" she exclaimed; "I don't like it! Is it dirty? or, has it belonged to some sick person? But really, how foolish this must seem to you, papa!"

"Never mind that," remarked her father; "go on, say anything you think. It may seem foolish to you, but it does not to me."

"I declare I should not be surprised if this letter came from a prison, or a lunatic asylum! I don't like it in my hand. There! that's all I can say." And she put it down.

"Now take the three up together, Agnes, and tell me if you know them apart, or think they were written by or to the same person, or are in any way connected with each other."

Agnes did as she was directed. But she laid down that third paper almost instantly. "That has nothing to do with the others," she said. "I'm not sure whether these others have anything to do with each other. I should not be surprised if they were written by the same person; they are not disagreeable like the other; they are rather nice. But there is something sad about them too. Wait!" She paused suddenly, turned her blindfold face towards her father, and then cried out in a voice of strange agony.

"Papa!"

Dr. Palmer unloosed the bandage instantly, full of compunction for what he had done. The truth had flashed upon her! Aye, and something more!

"Are they blaming Edgar Vivian for Allan Grale's death, papa?" she wailed. "Oh papa, papa, it is not true! However things may seem, it can never be true—it can never be true!"

"Agnes, my child," said the Doctor, "nobody is blaming anybody for anything—yet. How can they, when nothing is known of what has really happened?"

"But, papa, I have heard a word dropped in the last day or two, and I seem to discern all. Is it not true that Allan Grale is now thought to be dead—drowned—and that Edgar Vivian is supposed to —to have been with him at the last? Surely they cannot think that —that ——" She broke down, sobbing bitterly.

"Forgive me, my dear," said the Doctor, soothing her; "I never thought of its affecting you like this. It occurred to me to wonder whether you could find out any difference among those papers; I never dreamed you would guess that any of them were Edgar Vivian's."

"It came straight to me," she said, simply; "I cannot tell how. May I see those papers, papa?"

"No, my dear," he answered; "they are not mine to show. They are only in my keeping."

"And who wrote that one which is not Edgar's?" pursued Agnes. She did not seem to fear she might have made a mistake.

The Doctor was glad to be able to say "I don't know." This was quite true, since Edgar denied it.

"Then we can't tell whether anything I said about it was true?" she observed.

Dr. Palmer noticed that she asked no question as to the reasonableness or the reverse of the sudden alarm which had seized her. Her agitation had quickly passed; but it had left her very pale, with the wrung expression of one who has just passed through some sharp pain or severe shock.

"I feel terribly tired," she said, a few moments later. "I don't want any supper, papa. I think I'll go straight to bed."

As she kissed him her good-night, he folded her tenderly in his arms, and said: "Does my Agnes quite forgive her foolish old father for his silly blundering?"

"Forgive my father!" she answered. "He has done me good and not evil all the days of my life."

The more the Doctor thought over his experiment, the less he could come to any opinion concerning it. He knew well enough that Agnes had had some liking for Edgar Vivian, and under all circumstances, it was not unnatural that he should have come into her mind. But then why had she refused to associate with him the very letter which Edgar strenuously denied having written? The Doctor shook his head hopelessly.

When Mr. Grale asked next day, on the return of the papers, "Did you try your experiment, and did you make anything out of it?" Dr. Palmer replied briefly:

"I tried it; but the results were nothing that would be of the least significance to you."

"Were they to yourself?" enquired Mr. Grale.

"I can scarcely say," returned the Doctor. "If anything, they confirmed me in my original belief that the letter asking for the fifty pounds was not written by Edgar Vivian."

"Ah," returned Mr. Grale, with a shake of the head, "begging your pardon, Doctor, for the remark, there are none so blind as those who don't wish to see."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MEDIUMSHIP OF MISS BESSIE TEMPEST.

When Dr. Palmer received Mrs. Grale's formal note of request for his company on Saturday afternoon, with that of his daughters, he was inclined to hope that Agnes would decline it. But she said a once that she would go.

Mark Acland had accepted an invitation to bring the other walking-stick from Sladford himself, and to stay over the Sunday at Dr. Palmer's. He arrived with it on Saturday at noon.

Charles Carr wanted to see him for a reason of his own: he had completed the new mechanism on which he had been so busy, and

he wished to show it to the sympathising comrade of his boyhood, before sending it away for practical test.

The new watchmaker's hammer, which he had bought and used, was waiting to be returned to Webster, the owner of the one he had mislaid; but Charles had forgotten the man's address. He enquired it when sending the intimation to Mark Acland, for it was he who wrote, and Mark sent the address back in his note of acceptance. Charles at once despatched the instrument to Webster, with a note of apology and explanation.

Dr. Palmer was struck by the change which had come over his daughter Agnes. He could not define it. It was not a look of dignity, or of calmness, or of resignation; but it was something of all three. There had been no tragedy in the good Doctor's own life. It had had a happy morning, happy struggles, happy success, happy love; and shall we be understood if we go on to say, happy sorrow, happy pathos, a long happy afternoon?

But whatever change might have been noted in Agnes Palmer's bearing, nobody but her father was thinking about her, as he and his daughters were ushered into the drawing-room at Moorland House.

They were the latest arrivals. Lady Laura Bond's fly had been driven over early, and George Vivian was punctual to the appointed hour. There was another person in the room, whose identity Dr. Palmer did not clearly apprehend in the murmur of hurried introductions. This was an elderly gentleman with a freakish-looking flaxen wig. He had a clean-shaven face, young-looking from a distance, but scored and counter-scored by hundreds of minute wrinkles, which somehow suggested a previous acquaintance with rather trying cosmetics. He was talking in a high treble to George Vivian; and in a very few remarks he managed to introduce the Army, India, and the Continent in a way which suggested a personal knowledge of them. Dr. Palmer had scarcely taken time to wonder who this individual might be before the young person whom the Doctor recognised as the central interest of the group addressed him as "Pa."

The "young person!" Dr. Palmer read that invidious designation in his daughter Agnes's eyes, as they rested, with straightforward doubt and disfavour, on the "medium," Miss Bessie Tempest. She was a little woman, with a slender waist and frisky flaxen curls, which somehow looked like her father's wig. She was got up to represent a simple young thing, with school-girl frills, and two or three quaint little ornaments, such as we find in odd corners of good grandmothers' jewel-cases. Nevertheless, Agnes Palmer was quite sure that Miss Bessie Tempest was not very much under thirty.

Afternoon tea was brought in. Miss Bessie whispered something to Lady Laura with a laugh. Lady Laura replied that everybody here was friendly, and then explained publicly that Miss Bessie had questioned the prudence of this little hospitality, since prejudiced

people had been known to enquire whether some slight refreshment was not usually tendered before séances, or whether the medium might not introduce hachish or some similar medicament therein for the bewilderment of the senses and the common sense of the lieges. "We will all watch you, Bessie," added Lady Laura, in her smoothest and sweetest manner. "If anybody has drugged me now, we must certainly trace it back to Mrs. Grale's respectable servants."

"It is not in that way that she will try to cheat us," thought Agnes Palmer: and while the rest of the company laughed lightly, she was serious.

"An uncompromising girl," decided that experienced matron, Lady Laura Bond, who was looking at her, "and we might be better without her. But how distinguished looking!"

Then Lady Laura availed herself of the introduction which had just passed. "I am trying to keep up a little social lightness, Miss Palmer," she whispered, "for dearest Mrs. Grale's sake. The novelty alone of this assemblage is trying to her nerves: I can see that. And she has her own terrible fears besides."

"I cannot think how she can endure such a thing as this," answered Agnes, in a low voice, turning her clear eyes on Lady Laura's face, and never supposing she was running against opinions.

"My dear, we must keep everything very smooth and sympathetic for her sake," returned Lady Laura, with gentle emphasis. "I think a jar of any sort would be more than she could bear. And we are sure to have our reward. A little loving self-restraint generally obtains better evidence than the keenest scrutiny."

Agnes said nothing. She did not like the strangers: she somehow suspected them.

The business of the evening was soon proceeded with. It was evident that Mr. Tempest took upon himself the part of master of the ceremonies. He and his daughter had a pretty little affectionate wrangle over the arrangement of the sitters. He had his own way. "I always do," he said. "I know exactly how Bessie's powers must be considered, and what is good for her."

"Poor dear pappy!" said the little person, "I think you must get terribly tired of it."

"I get the commendation of the spirits," said Mr. Tempest, impressively, "and that suffices for me."

"Who are the spirits?" asked Agnes of Lady Laura in a whisper. She formed her question so, though it had arisen in her own mind as "Who are the spirits supposed to be?" Fancy thinking of her own dear dead mother as one of the spirits!

"There are some special to any occasion, of course," replied Lady Laura, in the same tone. "But Miss Tempest has her own group of guardians who are always in attendance."

"And who are they?" persisted Agnes.

"There is one named 'Chang-li,'" said Lady Laura. "He was a

Chinese mandarin of the highest rank who lived about two hundred years ago. Then there is one who calls himself the 'Young Pretender,' he will never tell us plainly whether he is a royal Stuart; but from internal evidence, we think so. And then there is 'Jane Shore.' I dare say that will astonish you; but after a time one gets to look differently on these things."

"So the oracles are a pagan, a prodigal, and a light woman!" Agnes might have thought had she been censorious. "But"—she said aloud—"are the guardian spirits ever common people? People who have been in business; or faithful old family servants; or anybody of that kind?"

Lady Laura looked up at her again. She understood all that Agnes did not say. "These mediums are doing a great work," she answered, rather coldly. "Naturally they attract the influence and care of spirits in high place. Common people, doubtless, have common guides. But hush, something is soon to begin."

Mr. Grale had now brought forward the two walking-sticks. He laid them on the table in the centre of the group. His hand trembled a little as he did so, and Mrs. Grale began to cry quietly.

"Bessie is passing under an influence already," proclaimed Lady Laura, in a stage whisper.

"Keep perfectly quiet," instructed Mr. Tempest, lifting his hand. "My daughter has not yet lost consciousness. If anything disturbs her just now, the whole sitting may be spoiled."

Lady Laura gave a little deprecating gesture. Nobody else stirred or spoke; there was complete silence.

"Bessie is under control now," said Mr. Tempest, presently. "My daughter herself is quite unconscious of all that passes before her," he added, in explanation. "I must be always with her under these circumstances. Her guides assure me I may entrust her to them, yet they applaud my solicitude. If we were to tell Bessie any fact now, or make her any promise, we should find that she knows nothing whatever about it, upon coming to herself."

"And what is supposed to become of your daughter's spirit in the meantime?" asked Dr. Palmer.

"The guides say that they put it into the mesmeric sleep. Sometimes they leave it so, unconscious; sometimes they lead it through that sleep into higher spheres, whence it returns refreshed and illuminated."

Dr. Palmer could not help thinking that despite these distinguished attentions, Miss Bessie Tempest looked but a jaded and frivolous creature. Agnes happened to be thinking the same.

Suddenly the medium stretched out her hand towards the staves. Her eyes were not quite closed, but there seemed no speculation in them, and indeed no vision, for she groped vainly for the sticks after the manner of the blind. She laid hold first of that which young Acland had brought from Sladford. She passed her hand down it from the ferule to the handle, and then she gave a shiver.

"There is some coarse, bad influence here," she muttered.

"This is certain to be 'Jane Shore,'" whispered Lady Laura. "She always comes for clairvoyance."

The medium spoke again; her hand was now on the other stick, Allan's own crook, with the silver ring.

"This is strange," she said, fingering it. "It feels cold and strange: what can be the meaning?"

She seemed to ask the question only of herself. Mrs. Grale murmured that it was quite right; that it had been lying on the earth for months and months. "And," added the poor woman, "the ground is always damp round the Black Pool."

"Now, nonsense!" cried Mr. Grale. "It can't be cold through that: it has been standing in the sunniest corner of this house for days."

"I expect the control alludes to a psychic chill," explained Mr. Tempest. "But we must not rush to conclusions too readily. Give her time."

She was still groping about the sticks, first one, then the other, as if puzzled. The company watched with absorbed interest.

"These do not—I think—belong—either of them—to anybody here," she slowly said, and the silence of the listeners seemed to give a curious expression of assent. "I—stay!—I shall see a form presently:—I see a figure already, but too dimly to describe it yet. Will the friends converse among each other? There is a little want of fusion in the mental atmosphere."

"This is going to be a splendid sitting," Lady Laura whispered.

"I hope it is not going to be too dreadful," said poor Mrs. Grale. "It's wonderful how she seems to know things by the touch. You see she did not dislike poor Alny's stick; only the other one—and that, I am sure, never was his."

George Vivian, at this juncture, was seized with a long, troublesome cough. Agnes looked sharply at him, tempted to think that it began in a giggle. Anyhow, it went on seriously enough. He tried to smother it by holding his pocket-handkerchief to his mouth—Agnes noticed that handkerchief of specially fine cambric, with a narrow black line running round it just above the hem. It struck her as singular that so punctilious a dandy as George Vivian should carry a black-edged handkerchief when he was not in mourning.

"You are quite sure you never said a word about Alny to Miss Tempest, Lady Laura?" pleaded Mrs. Grale.

"Quite positive," said Lady Laura, decisively. "Mr. Tempest can answer that for me. I have not been alone with Bessie at all; he has been with us entirely. Dear Mrs. Grale, you may believe me. I have not spoken upon the subject to either Mr. or Miss Tempest."

"Certainly not," confirmed Mr. Tempest. "It might have a bad effect upon my daughter, were she told anything beforehand—would be almost sure to take her power away."

"My! how particular the spirits must be!" cried Mrs. Grale.

"Hush!" said Mr. Tempest: "Hush! Listen!"

"The figure is coming into view," the medium was beginning, dreamily. "It is a young man. The hair is fair—a lightish brown, and a little curling. The face has a nice colour. It is a pleasant face. Now it is growing sad."

Mrs. Grale was violently agitated.

"It is standing behind the mistress of the house," went on the entranced medium. "It smiles and makes a gesture of affection towards her. Now the face grows sad again and a little angry ——"

"Oh, not angry with me!" cried the poor mother.

"Calm yourself—calm yourself, dearest friend," Lady Laura entreated of Mrs. Grale: "or we shall not be able to go on."

"The figure entreats the lady to be calm; it cannot otherwise communicate," proceeded the medium. "It is fading! It wishes much to say something, but it cannot."

"All that must mean that Alny is dead!" wailed the mother.

"No, no, it need not," said Lady Laura.

"But it is the spirits of the dead that appear again," urged the bewildered woman; "not the spirits of the living."

"When clairvoyants are in this mesmeric state they can see living people at a distance," said Lady Laura. "Perhaps your son—if that was your son—is at this moment wishing he was with you, or is asleep and dreaming of you! We might have discovered everything if you could only have been calm."

Mrs. Grale made a supreme effort. "I'll try to be," she said.

"The figure is returning," spoke the medium. "It holds a picture. Such a gloomy place!—a dark pool surrounded by trees. He points to the water!"

Mrs. Grale fairly shrieked. The medium shrieked too—and started up with extended arms and glaring eyes.

"This is one of the dangers to which we are always exposed," cried Mr. Tempest, in a white heat of suppressed agitation. "Mrs. Grale is too excitable, poor lady. She has disturbed my daughter's peculiar state, and that is dangerous to the medium. And possibly, too, at the same time, my daughter's gift was brought into contact with something terrible—when it comes suddenly upon a dead body, for instance, there is always a sharp convulsion."

"Bessie will be taken care of," said Lady Laura, sweetly. "The controlling spirits will erase every painful picture from her brain before they restore her to herself. But we must think of dear Mrs. Grale. She really must retire."

"I will go with her," said Lettice Palmer, who herself looked a little pale and tremulous.

Poor Mrs. Grale did not object; she felt too bewildered, too unhappy. During the commotion of their withdrawal, the medium half awoke, gave a few wailing sobs, and then "went off" again.

"Will the friend, controlling, say whether she still sees the figure?" asked Mr. Tempest.

"I do," replied the medium. "But it is changed. He is like an image. He conveys to me that it was not by his own will he—he—what is it he says?—went away? I think that's it. Not by his own will he went away."

"Ha!" ejaculated Mr. Grale.

"He won't tell me anything about it," proceeded the medium. "He shakes his head. But in the air I see a luminous word. What is it?—'play?' Is not that queer?"

There was no mistaking the intense interest of the audience, albeit the expression of each face was singularly varied. Richard Grale's was quite fierce in its suspense. Mr. Tempest glanced round.

"Is there no word beside?" he said. "This may be some mistake."

"Is it that we shall 'play music?'" suggested Lady Laura. "The controls often ask that, when the sitters need soothing."

The medium shook her head vigorously.

"Is there some word to precede 'play?'" suggested Mr. Tempest. "Fair play, for instance?"

"That's it, that's it," cried the medium. "I see it all now. Two words. They are not fair play, but 'foul play.' The figure is fading—it is gone!"

"May we ask any question?" enquired Mr. Grale, eagerly.

"Yes, certainly," said Mr. Tempest; "only questions cannot be always answered."

"Can the lady tell me anything about a certain box in my possession?" Mr. Grale asked accordingly, with an air of timidity which sat upon him strangely.

"The medium turned her face towards him. "I think I know the one you mean," she muttered, after a pause. "I don't like it," she decided.

"Can you tell me what is in the box?"

"Papers," she answered, confidently. Then she added, "I am not sure but there are other things also—perhaps jewels."

"That's good!" said Mr. Grale. "That's a wonderful test, even down to her not being quite sure."

"I like a test that comes out in that natural, simple way," observed Mr. Tempest, smoothing his hands with complacency.

The medium suddenly rose, and stepped slowly round the table, till she reached George Vivian's chair. Amid the rapt attention of all present, she put her hand on his shoulder, and said softly:

"You have a secret sorrow—a trouble, and nobody suspects it. You do not say I am wrong?"

George Vivian, whose head was bent, did not speak.

"You know I am right," she went on, in the calm, dreamy tone. "There are two influences in your life, there are in all lives—but in yours, they are both very strong and very distinct. One is controlled by your bad angel, the other by your good one. The bad one is

nearest you yet. It seems to you and to many to be an angel of light. But I think it will be soon found out. Have faith in your good influence. I see bright days before you—many bright, happy years. That shows that the good influence triumphs."

George raised his head, as if he were about to ask a question; but none came from him.

She moved on to Mr. Grale's chair. Her figure changed curiously, so did the very features of her face, and when she spoke her voice had a strange foreign twang.

"Sare," she said, "I have to say to you, 'Temper justice with mercy:' and believe all hidden things will be made manifest in a right way. Dat is all. You are very keen practical man. Do you know our great philosopher, Confucius? You would appreciate him."

"That is 'Chang-li,'" whispered Lady Laura.

The medium passed on to Dr. Palmer. "Sare," said the queer voice, "there is an atmosphere of light and joy about you. There is healing in your presence. Our medium has felt it. She might have suffered more under the shocks of the present sitting had you not been here. People may think they deceive you, because you are so wise and far-seeing that you always choose to trust the goodness which is in the worst, and which sometimes they do not know themselves."

The last expression of face and voice were passing. The medium put both her hands on Lady Laura's shoulders.

"Dearest friend," she said, "the spirits bear witness to your cheerful struggles with the trials you nobly bear in silence. You will get speedy help over the trouble which is now distressing you. Some of those to whom you are always ready to tender the highest light and leading will seek out your difficulties and straighten your paths before you. Worse than widowed lady, celestial love waits ever on your footsteps, and I am but the humble interpreter of influences too lofty to communicate directly with earth. They send, by my hand, a string of pearls and a cross of gold to the White Dove."

She went through a form of delivering invisible articles to Lady Laura, who kissed her hand with dramatic fervour and murmured, "Your words have never failed me yet."

The medium then passed on to Agnes Palmer.

"Maiden," she said, insinuatingly, "have you not any question to ask me?"

Agnes looked straight at her. What a mean little face it was! like that of a wax doll, on whose insipid commonplace some malicious sculptor had graved a few lines expressing cunning and selfishness!

"No," said Agnes, "I have nothing whatever to ask."

The medium drew back a little from the table and puckered her brow. "A name is suddenly given me," she said. "I don't know what it means. I think it is the name of somebody in the room."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Grale, eagerly.

"Some of the letters come and go," she said, seeming to trace them

with her finger on the atmosphere. "E D G——, yes, Edgar. Then there are two V's in the other name——Viv—Vivian. Do you know who that is?"

Agnes's face was white and still as marble. George Vivian spoke.

"Yes; that is my younger brother," he said. He was evidently surprised.

"My son Allan's latest confidant," said Mr. Grale. There was not much in the words, but there was a great deal in the tone; and George, who (wrapt in his own affairs and in his attendance on the General) was profoundly ignorant of what had been going on around him for some months past, looked at his old neighbour in surprise.

"The influence is passing!" exclaimed Mr. Tempest. "But it has been an unusually protracted sitting, and I think I may say successful—yes, successful, though most painful."

"Poor Mrs. Grale," sighed Lady Laura. "Dear Bessie," she added, kissing the medium, who was now looking around as if half awake and bewildered, "you have told us wonderful things. We were so afraid, for you grew agitated in speaking words that seemed to intimate this poor young gentleman is lying in some terrible dark water."

"The Black Pool," spoke Mr. Grale, harshly.

"Oh, I never said so, did I?" asked the medium, in apparent alarm. "Oh, but you must remember that you may have misunderstood me! Did I speak in figures, pa, as you say I generally do?"

"Yes, my dear, you did," answered pompous Mr. Tempest.

Everybody had pushed back their chairs with a certain sense of relief. The doors had been set open, and the servants were coming in with wine and sundry light refreshments ordered to be in readiness. There was James, who had known too much from the beginning, and there was Susan as ready to hear as to speak.

"Where is Mrs. Grale?" asked the medium.

"She had to go away," said Lady Laura. "It was too much for her."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" lamented Miss Tempest. "Did the control say anything very sad?"

"It gave the word 'foul play,'" said Mr. Grale, in the same ominous tone.

"Do you know of any water answering the description given by the control?" asked Mr. Tempest.

"Yes," answered Mr. Grale. "The Black Pool; a place near here."

"Would you care to have it dragged?" enquired Mr. Tempest. "It might be a singular testimony," he added, only half aloud.

"It is very deep," replied Mr. Grale. "But it might be done—money would do it."

"Ah, you rich people, who can dare to say this shall be done, and that shall be done," sighed Lady Laura.

"Was it not singular that your brother's name should be introduced, Mr. George?" whispered Mary Anne Grale, aside. She had felt herself rather overlooked during the sitting, but she firmly believed she

must be that "good influence" which had been indicated to George, and so was comforted. "And was there really any meaning in the wonderful things which were said to you?"

"It was strange to bring in poor old Edgar," George answered. "There was nothing very wonderful said to me."

"About the secret sorrow?" whispered Mary Anne.

"Yes, that was a fortunate hit; but all the rest about the influences was mere twaddle," he replied, rather restively.

"Perhaps you fail to recognise its truth," gently said Mary Anne.

By this time they were all making preparations for departure, intending not to disturb Mrs. Grale. With as much gallantry as he could command, Mr. Grale prepared to hand her ladyship to her hired carriage. From what had passed, it seemed that poor Lady Laura was not without her own difficulties. "Aristocratic shoes often pinch," said homely Mr. Grale to himself, and added aloud: "You seem to have good friends among the spirits, Lady Laura."

"I need them," she replied sadly, "I have few earthly ones."

"Well, well," said the manufacturer, "I'm but a plain man, and if I put it bluntly, you must excuse me. But I take it very kindly that your ladyship has tried to do so much for me, and if ever—if there's anything I could advise you on, or help you in, you've only to say the word, and Richard Grale is at your service."

Lady Laura raised her dark liquid eyes. "How can I thank you!" she said. "My spirit friends are true prophets. Your generous offer has not come too soon, for, indeed, I need such a friend. I shall take the liberty of writing a letter to you to-morrow, Mr. Grale, explaining certain circumstances to you."

"That's right," responded Mr. Grale. "I like to be taken at my word. Yes, the spirits do seem to know a thing or two. There's few would have said I could appreciate a philosopher."

"Of course," said Lady Laura, rather absently. "Dear Mr. Grale," she added, "when you hear my distresses, you must not trouble your good wife with them. She has enough sorrow of her own just now, without making her sensitive soul bleed for a friend."

"Sometimes it does people good to find that others beside themselves have something to bear," returned Mr. Grale: "but it shall be exactly as you wish, Lady Laura."

The Palmers and George Vivian were hastening along the twilight road. George had offered his arm to Lettice, and they were talking gaily. Agnes was clinging to her father, and between them there was perfect silence.

"Agnes," said the Doctor at last, "I want to hear what you think about it all? Was it unaccountable truth? or was it deep-laid trickery?"

(To be continued.)

A COUNTRY HEART.

By G. B. Stuart.

I.

"GOOD-MORNING, Miss Verey; I thought I would just look round and see if you were inclined to come out."

"Come out! Isn't it pouring with rain?"

"Why, yes, to be sure, so it is! Well, may I come in, then?"

"Come in, by all means, but shake yourself well first in the hall. Now," as Harry Tredennick disappeared from the window and entered by the front door, which at Myrtle Bank stands wide open all the lodging-letting season: "take the paper, or put my work-box in order, or look at *Cornhill* till I have finished my letter, and then we can make some plans."

The young man sat down with the paper held suggestively in front of him, but his eyes looked unblinkingly over the top of it at Miss Verey. He was not much of a reader, at the best of times, and would not think of so employing himself except under severe pressure.

Kate Verey went on writing: "The one young man of this benighted place has just dropped in to call, for the fourth time since Sunday."—This was such a telling way of winding up her letter; so much more effective than "The post is just going," or "Mamma is calling me to make tea."—"He is a kind of giant, who lives in these solitudes," she went on, to her friend, Mrs. Chamberlain; "fairly good-looking and well-mannered, only rather a bore about incessant sight-seeing. I believe he has a baronetcy somewhere in the back-ground. Now, don't go and repeat all this to Captain Anstey the next time you are hard up for conversation, or he will be sure to say something nasty and sarcastic about my summer at the seaside! By-the-bye, is he going to do any yachting this year?"

Mrs. Chamberlain was Kate Verey's dearest friend; Captain Anstey was her cousin and her guest; and Kate herself was the prettiest and most whimsical girl in their set, who, instead of going visiting among her friends after the London season was over, as all properly disposed girls would have done, insisted on carrying her mother off to a remote South Coast fishing-village for the two months of autumn which should, canonically, be spent in Scotland. Whether she repented her freak, and whether she really wished the end of her letter to be preserved from Captain Anstey's knowledge, I leave the reader to determine.

"There! that's done," said Kate, looking up and catching her visitor's round grey eyes fixed upon her, which disconcerted the "kind of giant" much more than the London-bred young lady. "Anything in the paper this morning?'

"I wasn't reading—I mean I don't think so—yes there is, though; a seal came ashore at Polkerry. Would you," very diffidently, "like to hear about it?"

"Oh, no, not for the world! Isn't there any cholera news, or any military and naval appointments, or anything about people one knows?"

"The Rev. John and Mrs. Cannody and family at Sea View; the Misses Peach at 1, Marine Parade; Mrs. and Miss ——"

"Oh, stop, stop, for goodness' sake! I thought you had the *Post*, not that dreadful local story-teller. Just see if there are any yachts in, and then we will decide what is to be done with to-day."

"The *Araminta*, Mr. Seagrave, gone on to Weymouth; the *Waterbaby*, Captain Harrison, and the *Jessamine*, Mr. Lockhart, for Cowes; the *Elinore*, Hon. Charles Burke, put in here to coal. She's that big, hulking thing lying half across the harbour.—I don't see any fun in steam yachting."

Miss Verey's interest in the yachts was not very great, for she only answered: "Is that all?" and looking across at the bay, which lay below the window: "I think it's clearing" she said. "I'll go and see what mamma is doing, and tell her we are going out. I want a hundred things in the town, and you can come and carry them for me."

These two young people had grown very friendly during the month that the Vereys had spent at Myrtle Bank. The young lady was the elder by two or three years, and by all the experience of life, from childhood, in London Society. Harry Tredennick knew Mrs. Briscoe, the parson's wife of the neighbourhood, old Madam Tredennick, his own grandmother, and her attendant, Miss Meux, and perhaps half a dozen young ladies of Torferry; good, red-cheeked, rather shapeless young women of a pattern well-known in this and other country localities. Here his experience of the fair sex came to an end. Miss Verey knew, or appeared to know, the whole Army and Navy, the Bar and the Church, the ins and outs of both Universities; not to speak of diplomatic circles, political circles, aristocratic circles, theatrical circles—widening out indefinitely into the vast ocean of society, which used to make young Tredennick by turns rabidly restless or dolefully dissatisfied with himself and his surroundings, wishing that this world of which he knew so little and Miss Verey so much, had but one head to be smitten off at a blow.

For, of course, the soldiers and sailors, lawyers and curates, with dukes, peers and bigwigs of all sorts must be in love with her. How could it be otherwise, when Harry Tredennick, who had never cared to look at a woman before in his life, had been so completely vanquished by her charms the first moment he saw her in Torferry church? The tall, white-clad figure whom the old sexton handed ostentatiously up to the top of the church, just as Mr. Briscoe began the service, was as different in face and style and raiment from the

usual run of Torferry girls as a denizen from another planet could have been.

Half the girls in the place had white gowns for Sundays, but this one neither stuck out in front through too much starch, nor dropped down on the sides for lack of it; it hung in some mysterious graceful way which made it look just the right thing for the old country church and the blazing August day. There were lilac touches about it too; not aggressive bows and ends, but suspicions of colour at once cool and gay, and a shady hat with some white muslin round it, which Mrs. Briscoe afterwards in vain tried to achieve for her two half-grown girls with three or four yards of the finest muslin to be had in the town, and a dozen of lace that you would scarcely have known to be imitation!

Bond Street had twisted the muslin on Miss Verey's hat, and Regent Street had fashioned the inimitable simplicity of her dress, and both went to set off a face and figure which all modistes agreed it was a pleasure to decorate. No wonder Harry Tredennick, facing down the church from the Squire's square pew alongside the altar, heard little of service or sermon, and went near to forgetting his weekly duty of carrying round the offertory bag. He had never felt shy about this duty before, but somehow on this Sunday he half wished that Mark Rowe, the Briscoe's factotum, would collect both sides; it seemed such a boyish thing for the "young squire" to be doing—as if he were still Briscoe's pupil, as he had been a few years ago, when the custom arose. However, as one side of the church was evidently awaiting him and his bag, he was forced to go through with it, receiving the sticky pennies, and the elusive threepenny pieces which had been cherished all the morning in the palms of cotton gloves or the knotted corners of handkerchiefs, and a shilling from the stranger lady, who did not seem a bit flustered by the presentation of the red velvet watch pocket. Harry stood staring at her hand, with its long wrinkled glove, the ruffles of lace above, where a little rim of white arm gleamed, and the wonderful serpentine twists of gold bracelet. Miss Verey had handed him back the bag and in another moment she looked at him inquiringly, wondering why he still delayed. The boy turned crimson and hurried on, he hardly knew how. The lady only thought: "What a good-looking boy; reading with the clergyman most likely. He will do for boating."

After this first encounter, the next step was not difficult where the young man had the "Tredennick will," and the young lady was bored, and consequently accessible. The Briscoes called at Myrtle Bank on the London ladies, and Miss Verey returned the visit on behalf of her mother, and having brought no umbrella, was very glad to accept Mr. Tredennick's escort back, when a sudden storm caught her a few steps from the vicarage, where Mr. Tredennick and his umbrella had been lying in wait. He did not see any need to explain, but he knew the climate sufficiently to be on his guard even on

an apparently fine day, and an introduction was easily effected, Miss Verey graciously saying she had heard of him from his old friend Mrs. Briscoe.

Under the umbrella, which the young man was obliged to hold (so strong is the wind in this locality when a sudden squall arises!) Harry Tredennick found himself most wonderfully at his ease, considering that he had never in all his twenty years held a tête-à-tête with a pretty girl before. Perhaps it was the girl's doing that they so soon made friends, for as every intelligent woman knows there is no surer way of gaining a young man's admiration than by leading him unconsciously on to his own strongest ground. Kate Verey could no more help trying to make every man she met like her than she could help her hair curling. Consequently her tact led her to talk of the country and the coast, where Harry Tredennick was as much at home as a young seaman; of the Park, where his grandmother lived (Miss Verey had heard of "Madam" in Torferry, and knew that "the family" had been squires of Tredennick for six hundred years); of the Tors and moors and coves that she should like to see in the neighbourhood, but scarcely knew how to compass.

By the time they had reached Myrtle Bank, half a mile above the town, the infatuated young native had promised rows, sails, drives, rides in every direction, and Miss Verey with the mental note, "Mamma can't mind such a boy as this," had accepted some of the proposed excursions conditionally on Mr. Tredennick's coming in then and there and being introduced to her mother.

Then, as the rain continued, as it has a way of doing at Torferry, tea was brought in, and Mr. Tredennick must stay and have some, and the rapid friendship was cemented over the kettle-boiling, and the fire lighting and the toasting; for a sudden wet day in a lodging demands a fire and hot toast most imperatively. And when poor Harry at last tore himself away, half an hour short of his grandmother's dinner time, he was as sincerely in love with the London lady as ever any poor boy in this world has been with his first love, three years his senior.

"Don't tease the poor lad, Kate," said old Mrs. Verey, looking up from her novel when he was gone. "He is but a boy, and a very simple one, and it is scarcely fair to treat him like a man."

"Gracious, mother! that great big creature can look after himself; but I will treat him quite as a boy, I promise you."

And so she did, with a misleading frankness which was more dangerous to Harry's peace of mind than more subtle coquetries which might have puzzled and confused him. And from this artless boy-and-girl camaraderie, which Harry found so enchantingly real, and Kate so amusingly fresh, arose the friendly footing of affairs described in Kate's letter to Mrs. Chamberlain: "the young man has dropped in to call, for the fourth time since Sunday.—He rather bores me about incessant sight-seeing."

II.

KATE came down equipped for her walk. Harry had seen her in many costumes since the memorable white dress on that first Sunday, and each toilette, as it appeared from the arched travelling trunks above, seemed more marvellous and more becoming than the last.

But Kate's precaution against the rain threw all her other bewitchments into the shade. The costume for wet weather which had held good in Torferry from time immemorial was a long, circular waterproof cloak of brown or iron-grey. But this young lady from London had a real Redfern-cut "Newmarket," of darkest blue waterproof cloth, and a wonderful little yachting cap with a peak, under which the yellow curls twisted distractingly, as they had a way of doing in rainy weather: the serge skirts were short enough to clear the neat lace-up boots, and the slender hands, as shapely as the feet, were clad in dog-skin gloves.

I am afraid Harry stared rather more openly even than usual at this coquettish apparition, for Kate stopped in front of him and asked in all seriousness:

"What is there wrong with me? Don't mind saying. Am I crooked or anything?"

Tredennick was a shy young fellow, despite his gigantic size, and had not been brought up to know that nowadays any young man may openly tell any young lady she is good-looking to her face and without preamble, so he could think of no answer beyond, "Oh, you're all right." But his handsome grey eyes expressed something more, for even Kate, with all her experience, could not help flushing a little under their honest and evident admiration.

"Come along or we shall be late, and mamma has given me a dozen more commissions. I hope this is not the afternoon when all Torferry shuts itself up early and goes out to walk with its young man!"

Hardly are the careless words spoken than Kate feels rather than sees—for she is looking at her own pretty boots stepping down the wet path—that her companion is blushing hotly all over his fair skin and to the edge of the sunburnt neck which shows above his blue serge collar. She deftly changes the subject, inwardly laughing a little to herself that perhaps the young Squire has been joked, or, perhaps, even called to account for his infatuation at Myrtle Bank; while he is only conscious of Mrs. Briscoe's recent warnings against making himself and Miss Verey conspicuous, and his grandmother's contemptuous refusal to call on the London ladies, when he had at last screwed up his courage to demand outright what he had been hinting at for the last three weeks.

"Even if you forget you are a Tredennick, you may be sure these friends of yours do not," she had said, significantly. And Harry had there and then banged off to see the loveliest and dearest of her sex, the only woman he ever could or would love, anathematising the

ridiculous will of the old Squire, which left him under his grandmother's guardianship till his five-and-twentieth year.

Amongst one of the terrors of his childhood which poor motherless Harry Tredennick had learnt to hate was his grandmother's quarterly descents upon Torferry "for shopping," when the old, close carriage was in requisition, with both windows up, and Madam drove down to the town and spent the afternoon driving from one shop to another, harrying the shop people and abusing their wares. Harry, who was of a naturally peaceable, even, polite disposition, hated being taken on these outings, and as he grew older used to try and mollify the feelings of the tradespeople by being particularly civil on his own account and keeping particularly clear of the town altogether on the occasions of "Madam's" periodical visits. But shopping with Kate Verey was quite another thing. In fact it was an exquisite entertainment, which Harry did not know Torferry town was capable of producing.

First of all, there was the dairywoman to interview.

"Mrs. Tubbs, how is it that the last two junkets have been so much smaller than those we began with?" And Mrs. Tubbs makes answer, rolling up her arms in her apron and dropping her words very carefully and slowly: "Well, tu be sure, Miss, I knew they were tu sma'al, but indeed them fulish calves hav' been a-lapping up a'al the milk, and I says to Tubbs, they Lunnon ladies have such sma'al appetites, they du ——"

"Now, Mrs. Tubbs," said Kate, severely, "you know that isn't fair! You must choose between either me or the calves. I can get as good a junket from Mrs. Hooper ——"

"Don't yer speak of her, miss," cried the repentant Tubbs, who answered to the spur in a moment. "Her's as messy a hand about a dairy as I shouldn't like yu to touch a junket from." With which enigmatical criticism on her vis-à-vis, Mrs. Hooper, she promised a noticeable amendment in the size of the next junket, and parted from her customer with profound respect for the "Lunnon lady" who had detected the reduced quantity so cleverly.

"It's a ninepenny junket," explained Kate, laughing, "and we have it all times and seasons, a dozen times a-week, for mamma and I both adore it. Mrs. Tubbs sends it up in a lovely old china bowl. But when I began to notice that the wreath of flowers, painted round the inside edge, was every time becoming more and more visible, while at first not a sign of it showed above the cream, I determined I would try what effect a judicious reference to Mrs. Hooper would have on my diminishing delicacy. Now, come on to Tucker's, and see if that hopeful young man has got me my blue silk at last."

The long-expected London parcel had arrived, so Tucker was able to supply the dark blue knitting silk which Miss Verey was working up into the most dandified gentleman's socks that Harry had ever seen. He had not dared to ask for whom they were intended, though he had

watched their progress with intense interest, and was never so pleased as when their rapid growth required his services to hold another skein while Kate wound it. He possessed himself of the parcel now, and followed to the post-office, hurrying in to ask for the Myrtle Bank letters, by the second and undelivered mail, while Miss Verey remained outside chatting to Mrs. Briscoe, who, in spite of the damp, had been to call on the Rev. John and Mrs. Cannody, and welcome them to Torferry, in the hopes of getting a sermon or two out of them for her consumptive husband before the season was over. She had been rewarded by liberal promises of help from the gratified parson; and now, by meeting face to face the young lady with whom it was said young Harry Tredennick was making himself a great fool, Mrs. Briscoe, who was a kind-hearted, foolish, and intensely meddlesome lady, equally inclined to "gush" as to take ready offence, was "just a little bit" surprised. You know that her own overtures of friendship had not been as readily responded to as the young Squire's. Besides, she had an unacknowledged grudge against Miss Verey in the shape of several yards of tumbled white book-muslin, which had come to nothing as hat trimming, and was not even available for window-blinds. So no wonder that the little woman felt inclined for a scrimmage with the audacious stranger, and accosted her in a tone of virtuous hostility as she approached, and Harry Tredennick, lifting his hat, disappeared into the post-office.

Miss Verey, on her side, had no particular feelings of any sort for the Rectoress of Torferry, whom she found a dowdy little inquisitive person, and whose absorption in her neighbours' affairs she could not at all comprehend. But she had no objection to stand and chat with her in the middle of the High Street, especially when the party from the *Elinore*, the big steam yacht in the harbour, had just come ashore, and was also making for the post-office. Three men, in yachting dress, glanced approvingly at Kate Verey as they passed, and the last of them lifted his hat, half hesitatingly, as he looked a second time at the young lady, and she recognised him with a stately but gracious bow.

"A friend of yours?" gasped Mrs. Briscoe, so audibly that the gentleman must have heard.

Kate waited calmly till he had entered the swing door of the office, and then turning to the lady, answered: "Oh, yes; otherwise I should not have bowed!"

Mrs. Briscoe felt herself snubbed, and her colour rose; she rushed incontinently into the battle.

"I'm glad if some of your own friends are coming down to see you while you are here; it will give Henry Tredennick time to attend to his reading. My husband says he has been quite idle lately, and will have no chance of his examination in October unless all this—well—dangling about, was the Rector's expression—comes to an end."

Then, as Miss Verey did not speak: "You know, my dear girl, in a little place like this, people *will* take notice of such a very marked flirtation, and Henry Tredennick being the squire, and your mother such a very old lady."

Here Mrs. Briscoe got terribly confused, for the girl had slowly turned her face full on her, and was waiting to reply.

"Good afternoon," was all she said, however; and crossing the street, she joined Harry Tredennick, who was pushing out of the post-office with more letters and papers in his hands than he or his grandmother ever received at the Park in a month.

"Stop a moment," she said, "there is a gentleman in here I want to speak to." And when little Mr. Verriker emerged he was quite astonished at the friendly greeting he got from the exclusive Miss Verey, with whom in town he was but slightly acquainted.

Mrs. Briscoe, burning with her rebuff, had retreated upon the Misses Peach, of Marine Parade, whose diffident umbrellas came bobbing round the corner at the minute. But she could see the group at the post-office quite well: the animated girl and the pleased face of her London friend, Harry standing by, with the letters and parcels, looking down from his superior height in unconcealed jealousy of the new comer: the Hon. Charles Burke, and his other shipmate, minutely examining a case of nail-brushes in the chemist's window opposite, which, being of plate-glass, gave a very fair reflection of "Verriker's last!"

The young lady had positively nothing to say to Mr. Verriker when she addressed him; but a vehement desire to repay Mrs. Briscoe for her unwarrantable impertinence possessed her, and she guessed that this would have the desired effect. Accordingly, some questions about the yachting and some mutual friends were easily started, and Verriker began eagerly to regret that their racing engagements necessitated an immediate start for Falmouth directly the coaling was over. "Otherwise, I'm sure, Burke—let me introduce Mr. Burke to you, Miss Verey—would have been only too proud to take you and your people round to Torquay, if you cared about sailing. Is Mrs. Chamberlain with you?"

"You are very good," answered Kate, bowing to the Honourable Charles, who had now openly given over the study of the nail-brushes, and had drawn himself into the principal group.

"No, alas, Mrs. Chamberlain is in the north. No rural delights that I could urge would tempt her from home so near the 12th. I don't think the day would be observed at all in Scotland if she were known not to be at Invertocher, but would just be passed over unnoticed."

This was said to Mr. Burke, who had intimated, by a smile of intelligence, that he, too, knew Mrs. Chamberlain. Mr. Verriker, anxious to reassert his claim of prior acquaintance, here broke in.

"Anstey, her cousin, is at Falmouth: we are going round to meet

him. He has the *Halcyon* this year, Westerton's old boat. You know him, of course?"

"Captain Anstey? Oh yes. Well, I must be going, and wish you a very pleasant cruise, and good luck in the racing to-morrow. Are you going to race the *Halcyon*, did you say? Tell Captain Anstey, if you think of it, that you met me here, and that I am not a bit dull: he had better come round and see."

Miss Verey signed a little imperiously to Harry that she was ready to turn homewards, and sailed down the street, without another glance in the direction of Mrs. Briscoe's shepherd's plaid waterproof.

"Ill-mannered, fast chit," muttered that lady to herself, hastily quitting the Misses Peach. "If she hadn't flounced off, at a tangent, about nothing at all, she might have introduced those men to me, and I dare say they would have contributed something handsome for the infants' treat, if I had sent Mark Rowe on board with the collecting book."

Meanwhile Kate had declared that her other purchases and errands were of no account, and that she would rather finish the afternoon by a good walk than by poking in the town any longer; to which Harry gladly assented: his disconsolate face clearing rapidly as they left the streets, with their hideous possibilities of old friends and London men behind, and got into the open country, where he always felt himself to be at so much greater advantage. Then with the sea breeze in his face, and the young blood leaping pleasantly in his veins, as he and Kate kept pace together along the fresh sandy road, he made bold to proffer a request which had been in his head for some time, and had now taken shape as a plan which only wanted the seal of Miss Verey's approval.

"Next week I want you to come out for a whole day's boating. You said you would like to see the Giant Stones, and you have scarcely given the *Mermaid* a fair trial yet. Don't refuse me, for it's my birthday—my twenty-first; and you know other fellows have no end of a fuss made over them when they come of age; while I am tied on to Madam's apron-strings for another four years. I'll tell you what, we'll take your mother round to Shepstone, where some tenants of ours have a farm close by the shore, and we can leave her safely there with her books, and order dinner; and then I can take you for a good sail, and we can come back and make a regular feast of it! Don't deny me the treat I have set my heart upon! I've been planning it for ever so long, and"—pathetically—"just think what a lonely life I lead and how few pleasures I have!"

Kate laughed and turned to look at the eager young face beside her. Her own thoughts had been far away as he talked, but she was aware that he was proposing some expedition, which would lose all its charm unless she countenanced it.

"Oh yes! we'll come, of course," she assented. "Any day you like to settle."

"The day is a particular one," he explained again. "You must not forget it—next Tuesday, the 22nd of August."

"All right. Your birthday, is it? Then I'll be certain to remember it, and your coming of age shall be properly celebrated. I promise you, in spite of your grandmother and your late respected grandfather, and all the lawyers in Lincoln's Inn. By-the-bye," she continued, "do you know that Mrs. Briscoe has been lecturing me about making and keeping you idle, and interfering with your reading with the Rector? She even went so far as to say that there was a marked flirtation! Tell me, Mr. Tredennick, *are* you flirting with me? For if so, I shall be obliged to send for some of my friends—Mr. Verriker would do—and get them to shoot you!"

She had promised her mother she would treat him quite as a boy; and the careless words meant nothing to her; nor did they need the emphatic, "Good heavens, no!" with which Harry Tredennick repudiated the idea, half to himself, and with a blush on his brown cheeks, which almost belied his twenty-one years.

"Then you'll recollect Tuesday; and I will see you again and arrange about meeting, and all that, between this and then; and you'll get your mother to agree to Shepstone, for I want you for the whole day."

So they parted at the Myrtle Bank gate; the boy full of the pleasantest hopes; the girl, with a heart so joyfully resting on a happy certainty, which had nothing whatever to do with Torferry or Harry Tredennick, that the latter's cherished plan made as little impression on her mind as Mrs. Briscoe's rude words or Mr. Verriker's polite ones. For was not Gerard Anstey coming south, as he had hinted he should do, and as she had hundreds and hundreds of times assured herself he would or would not do, according as she was in a hopeful mood or the reverse.

Poor Harry Tredennick! had he known it, he and his birthday party had little to do with the girl's gay spirits and saucy speeches.

"You had better not come to fetch us," she called after him, "but give us the rendezvous somewhere remote down the coast, so that our movements may baffle your Tutoress."

And so saying, she turned into the house, and straightway forgot all about the young Squire.

III.

It was the brightest, most sparkling morning imaginable. The sea was blue in the distance, but molten gold where the *Halcyon* sprang through the sunshine which lay across Torferry Bay. Kate Verey and Gerard Anstey were leaning against the side, watching the clean furrow she left along the smooth water—at least, the girl's eyes wandered along the track, but the man's were fixed upon her face. Mrs. Verey, with her pillows and novels, was piled conveniently out of hearing. Captain Anstey was a masterful looking man. He was

evidently having his say; the say which he had come all the way from Scotland to "have out" with Kate Verey; and very soon both her hands found their way into his, and her eyes roved no longer along the sunlit furrow, but looked straight up into his dark face, and the compact was completed. Presently he puts his hand into his waistcoat pocket and draws forth a tiny parcel; a diamond ring with a broad gold setting.

"Look inside," and he holds it slanting so that she can read the letters engraved within—"G. and K., 22nd August, 1882"—and then he slips the ring on to her third finger.

"22nd of August! Why, that is to-day. How did you come to know that we ——, that is that I ——?" She stops in confusion.

"How did I know that we should want an engagement ring this very day? Because I had made up my mind, and was not going to take any refusal," he answers; and Kate thinks that a masterful lover is the most delightful thing in the world.

"Of course you knew for certain I was here," she goes on, with her old desire to tease this confident person reviving in her. "But suppose I had been out, or ill, or at a picnic, and we had not met for a day or two, after all; what would you have done with your 22nd of August? Good gracious!"—as the repeated date touched some hitherto slumbering chord of memory—"it is that poor boy's birthday, and I promised a week ago to keep it with him. Now, what will he think of me? What have I done? How could I forget it so completely?"

And she looks really so discomforted and confused that Captain Anstey stares, and answers:

"What can it matter what any boy thinks of you? Tell him, whoever he is, that you had more important things to think about, and then take him to the cake shop in Torferry, and give him a feed to make up. Or I'll tip him, if you like."

But these liberal ideas of consolation fail to comfort Kate for her careless treatment of her poor young friend. She feels as if a chill cloud had suddenly come over the perfect day, and again and again her thoughts will recur to poor Harry's disappointment, in spite of Gerard Anstey's attentions. He naturally thinks himself the hero of the hour, and cannot imagine why Kate should waste any consideration over the feelings of a boy (as far as Captain Anstey recollects, there are many very easy ways of assuaging a boy's wounded feelings) and his fiancée does not think necessary to explain that this boy is a head and shoulders taller than the Captain, and has quite as fine a moustache.

IV.

MEANWHILE the young Squire has wakened with the thought that the pleasantest day of his life has dawned; a day of which, in spite of Fate in the shape of Madam Tredennick, he means to be com-

plete master—a day which is to be only sunshine, and which is to throw a foretaste of radiance over all the coming years of his life. He has scarcely seen Kate to speak to since the day he had accompanied her into Torferry, but he had been twice over to Shepstone preparing for her reception at the farmhouse, and he thought with pride of all the preparations for her and her mother's comfort. There was a real Devonshire dinner provided, which would have served to feed a dozen hungry troopers; ducks, and plum tart, a junket, and unlimited cream. He hoped the London ladies would be able to put up with Mrs. Loveys' country cooking and service. Her crockery and glass he had supplemented with contributions from the Park, surreptitiously abstracted and brought down in the *Mermaid* beforehand.

And the final instructions, how Mrs. and Miss Verey were to meet him at the landing stage where the little *Mermaid* lay, with all her glory of new cushions, were conveyed to Kate in a note, which it cost Harry some time and pains to compose; for, besides being somewhat inapt with his pen, it was the first time he had ever written to this girl who was so gracious, so beneficent to him, giving him her attention, her brightest smiles, her kindest words, he almost fancied her love. If she did not love him already she should do so soon—she, who was so quick, must know what crowning boon was to make his twenty-first birthday perfect, what birthday gift he was going to ask at her hands.

And this note was lying unopened with a heap of other uninteresting correspondence on Miss Verey's dressing-table, where she had tossed it down among the *Graphics* and *Punchs* which were weekly forwarded by Mrs. Chamberlain: for had not Captain Anstey's card been brought to her at the same moment, and was not the card followed by the owner?

Harry had left the note to be sent to Myrtle Bank on that Monday afternoon when he rode out to Shepstone to make his final preparations; to settle some deck chairs in the orchard, where Mrs. Loveys was to spread afternoon tea. And Kate Verey tossed it aside unnoticed, as she recognised her lover's footstep on the gravel under the bedroom window, and then heard the sharp tinkle of the door bell, and the opening and shutting of the drawing-room door, the hurried scuffle of the maidservant on the stairs, and knew that the event on which she had this summer staked her happiness had come to pass.

And, after that, the pleasant little tea-party—which poor Harry thought was a special institution for his benefit—followed as naturally at Myrtle Bank as it did when Captain Anstey dropped in, four afternoons a week, in Lowndes Square. And the yachting engagement, with possibilities of another engagement tenderly implied in its persuasive "*Will* you come, Miss Kate?" was made; and the young Squire's carefully considered scrawl was swept aside and forgotten as completely as his birthday expedition and his whole existence.

Down at the landing-stage he waited, full of all the importance of the occasion ; through two long bright hours of the morning ; for with a countryman's consideration for two town-bred ladies, he had fixed the start a good deal later than Captain Anstey had done, and the *Halcyon* was bounding miles away while Harry sat idly pulling the tiller ropes of the *Mermaid* and looking up the little stony lane, expecting his guests to appear. Then, seized with dread that his instructions had not been plain enough, and that the ladies were certainly awaiting his escort at Myrtle Bank, he left his boat in charge of a boy, and darted up the hill at railroad pace to fetch them, quite overwhelmed at the thought that they should have waited, or that he had been remiss in the performance of any devoirs, which they had expected of him.

"They be gone this tu hours," was the reply of the Myrtle Bank landlady, who was taking the opportunity of giving her rooms a good turn out and had no time to waste in discussion. "No ; Miss Verey, her said as they would be out a'al day, and mebbe till laate, so they would only want supper when they comed to home and tu lay for a gentleman beside—they be gone out ta sail." And with this information, she began to sweep so determinedly that Harry saw she had really nothing more to tell.

Of course, that was where the mistake lay ! They had gone direct to Shepstone, probably in the little Norfolk cart which Miss Verey sometimes hired for her mother.

Now for the *Mermaid* as fast as might be, and to get to Shepstone the best way he might, sailing or rowing as the tide served, to repair as much as possible the unlucky misadventure of the morning. But at Shepstone came out comely Mrs. Loveys, in her best spotted gown and a straw bonnet tied behind, to give an air of al frescoe dignity to the entertainment.

"Where be they ? Mr. Harry, my dear ? I have everything prepared just beautiful. And will you please to look at the garnishing of the ducks, and if you please tu say if the ladies will take green tea ?"

Poor Harry could say nothing, but that he supposed there was some mistake, and he went and sat down by the water's edge, watching for a possible boat to make its appearance round the corner of the little cove ; while Mrs. Loveys' eldest boy, "Sonny," was instructed to keep watch at the cross roads behind the farm-house, and report the approach of any carriage from Torferry way.

The morning and midday were passed now, and the afternoon crept on, getting closer and more sultry as the sun dropped amongst a pile of clouds banked up in the western sky, and only showed at intervals, gilding the edges of the purple mass with thundery-looking gold. Harry Tredennick resisted all Mrs. Loveys' invitations to come in and take a bit of dinner, in spite of his disappointment. He only filled his pipe again and again, and sat moodily staring across the clear water of the cove to the open sea beyond. And, suddenly, with

a little breeze that crept close along the surface of the waves, the white wings of the *Halcyon* came across the picture at which he was disconsolately gazing—the *Halcyon*, with all sails set, making for Torferry as fast as she could; for weather-wise sailors knew that those clouds in the west, and little sudden noiseless breezes springing up unexpectedly, meant mischief. But the storm was not upon her yet, for there, plainly visible to the miserable, despairing eyes of the boy, was Kate Verey, in her blue dress, leaning back against the taffrail, and one white, ungloved hand was lying on Gerard Anstey's dark head, that rested against her knee.

The *Halcyon* got safely into Torferry harbour before the rain came down and the breeze freshened into a regular squall: the great thing was that the ladies got back to Myrtle Bank safe and dry. Everyone said it would have been such a bad ending to their delightful day, if they had been caught in the storm.

For there was a good deal of damage done that night. The yachts and the fishing-boats had to get in where they could, and put back the next day with different accounts of their difficulties and disasters. And, in the afternoon, with the high tide, the poor little *Mermaid* drifted into the bay, with her gay cushions gone and her mast snapped short, and nobody to bring her to at the steps, as Harry Tredennick used to do so proudly. Captain Anstey brought the news up to Myrtle Bank: the young Squire was missing; but he never thought of connecting the lost master of the *Mermaid* with Kate's disappointed boy.

Harry never came to shore again. There is a coloured window in the church, over the altar pew, that keeps his name in memory, but where his body lies in the great sea is an unfathomable secret, and when the family vault was shut down, after old Madam's funeral, it closed upon the last of the Tredennicks.

Miss Verey's engagement to Captain Anstey made an immediate difference in their plans, and caused their return to London to be considerably hastened. Kate is Mrs. Anstey now, and the Captain has the right to be as dictatorial as he pleases, but his wife is much quieter than of old, and has tamed down in a manner that surprises all her old friends. It is wonderful to see how she has completely given up all her "little ways," as people used laughingly to call them. She has scarcely anything to say now to any man beside her husband, and society in general thinks that Mrs. Anstey is a nice woman spoilt by matrimony.

And Kate Anstey knows that, in spite of any happiness that comes to her in the life she has chosen, she will always carry about with her the reproach of some words which she heard in Torferry church long ago, and which ring in her ears day and night: "*There is sorrow on the sea: it cannot be quiet!*"

BOARD-SHIP FRIENDSHIPS.

THOSE who have occasion to cross the Channel now and then must have often speculated—that is to say, if they were not sea-sick—upon the idiosyncrasies of their fellow-passengers. Similar people are met every day in the streets and in places of public entertainment, but are rarely given a moment's thought. The sea is, however, a great leveller—of conventionalities as well as of other things—and so persons who would never think of recognising one another ashore will be found conversing and friendly afloat.

But if civilities can be interchanged between persons who are strangers to each other on the short run across from Dover to Calais, or Kingstown to Holyhead, how much more are the amenities of our social life admissible on an ocean-going steamer—one, say, to India or America? In the latter situation friendships—or, perhaps, enmities—take the place of an hour's chatty conversation; and so it not infrequently happens that a friendship hastily contracted on board ship will influence a person's whole life for good or evil.

In the old novels of Indian life it is amusing to note the importance which the novelists attach to board-ship friendships. Young ladies are especially warned to be very careful about the friendships they make in a voyage in one of the old Indiamen of the period. They are recommended to treat their fellow passengers with an air of dignified but courteous reserve, and to wear a noli-me-tangere expression always, when in the society of the ship's officers or the cadets. Nor was the advice to be altogether despised, because it is a truism of all times, and in all the vessels that sail the seas, that it is much easier to fall into a friendship on board ship than to fall out of one.

One of the commonest of travelling characters met with at sea is the man who is all warmth and kindliness at first. He helps you with your luggage, he offers a light for a cigar, he directs you to the chief steward's den, or he performs any one of those thousand trifling but graceful offices which serve to lay the lines of a board-ship friendship.

This amiable creature, whom for the present you don't know from Adam, is evidently taken with you, and, if you have the average amount of vanity accorded every human being, you cannot but feel flattered by his preference. For there are dozens of other persons on board to whom he might as genially attach himself; but he admires you alone. You think that you and he must have sympathies in common, and accept his advances with a good grace. He says he will sit next you at dinner, and you agree. Then you find out more about him. He may be a Collector of Koochperwanee, in Bengal, or an American Senator, or a China tea-taster, or an Australian

squatter, according to the route you are travelling; but whatever he is, you know that he is a gentleman, a man of good station, who can have no designs upon your purse, and so you are charmed with him. Your heart expands to his blandishments—possibly to his wine—and you give him your opinions on men, women, and things in general with a freedom which even at the time strikes you as scarcely prudent.

But he reciprocates. He tells you, sotto voce, that the lady across the table is a divorcée, that the man with the big black whiskers is flying from justice, and that the other, with no hair at all on his face, is a well-known Fenian desperado.

A man who can impart his confidences in this friendly way may be trusted with your own, you illogically think, because the excitement of going on board, the bustle, and the prospect of a week's or a month's close companionship with such an agreeable rattle has put you a little off your head.

Well, it is all very well as long as it lasts. For a few days you and your board-ship friend might pass for Damon and Pythias together. But one morning there is a coolness—about a woman; perhaps the very divorcée aforesaid—and you begin to think a good deal less of Mr. Pythias than heretofore. Next day, or the next, there is an actual quarrel, and then, to your infinite disgust, the perfidious Pythias manages to let all the people around know what you have been saying of them: to which he adds a good deal of what he has said himself. Friendships of this hot-house growth generally, indeed, turn into bitter enmities before the voyage is over, so that an old traveller will regard the advances of the apparently friendly, well-meaning fellow with suspicion, and keep him at a distance as much as possible. It is better to do this than to suffer the discomfort of sitting next a man at breakfast, lunch and dinner, every day with whom you are on bad terms. It is better to do this than to have to encounter the furious looks of the pseudo divorcée, who is in fact a most respectable person, fondly attached to her invalid husband who is then on board: better than to stand an action for libel threatened by the man with the black whiskers, who turns out to be an emissary for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

Even a more dangerous kind of friendship than this last is a flirtation with a woman, double or single. The friendship in this case is not forced upon one, certainly, but it is none the less perilous for that. On every ocean steamship there are pretty women, and pretty women without much to do. Dr. Watts tells us what are the diabolical consequences of idleness. The offer of a book to read, or of a chair to sit down on may be the commencement of Heaven knows what—a marriage, an elopement, a breach of promise suit, an appearance in Sir James Hannan's Court, or a double suicide after the French manner with charcoal.

"What great events from trifling causes spring!"

And it is unfortunately the fact that nowhere is ladies' society more attractive, or are ladies themselves more gracious than on board ship. There is so little to do, and they are so glad to be amused. But the man generally pays more or less for the boon of a lady's friendship on board ship, unless indeed the friendship is of such a very platonic character as a husband or lover could find no fault with. In several cases out of a dozen it all ends in a row. For there are many sea-going dames and demoiselles who are as ready to change their friendships as their gloves. The Delilahs who go about the decks in the coollest and freshest toilettes and in the most delicious straw hats, have further the disadvantage of appearing to offer more in the way of friendship than they mean. Half the women who go down to the sea in ships have no more idea of the sacredness of friendship than suits their own convenience. If they have no male protectors they will gracefully accept the servitude of the nearest man ; but their notion of the contract is that the man must be quite content to serve them on his knees, and that he must not on any account complain if they turn their paniers upon him at New York or Liverpool.

Certainly, the women are fairer and more above-board in these dealings than the men. The latter are often silly enough to think that they can get women to fall passionately in love with them in the course of an eight days' voyage, and expect the ladies to go ashore in tears over the agony of the parting.

A kindly woman's friendship—even if it is only of the fleeting character of most board-ship friendships—is, nevertheless, a great consolation at sea. It is pleasant to have a lady as a neighbour at table for one thing, instead of, perhaps, the ship's doctor, smelling of pills. It is more satisfactory to converse with a woman about the glories of the deep and the brightness of the stars than with a male functionary, such as the first officer. To take a very selfish view of such a sweet communion as this, a friendship with a woman, too, saves one from the troubling of the men. The bull-board maniacs, the Pan-pokerists, the Philo-rubbers, and all the other masculine torments of the lazy man at sea must let him alone when "Beauty chains him to her chair." But the wise man, even though he be lazy, will lay to heart well the fact that "Beauty" will be doing precisely the same for some other fellow three months hence after she has made the tour of Europe, and is steaming West again.

The friendship of the sexes on board ship is, nevertheless, open to serious misconstruction. The pleasure of a pretty woman's companionship at table and on deck is one that must be paid for in a certain amount of "talking." Idleness begets gossip, and people—that is to say, passengers—are very idle at sea. Platonic attachments are entirely discredited there, and the affinity of souls abandoned. And if, as often happens, the unlucky pair on whom the public attention is concentrated, should in petulance, and just to defy public opinion, parade their innocent little friendship ostentatiously, the con-

sequences may be dangerous for a married woman. Slander travels quickly, and the husband, in the Punjab or Hong-Kong, will hear of his wife's doings afloat. Quarrels, misunderstandings, and a separation follow, which make rather a high price in all to pay for a mere board-ship friendship.

Women can hardly be too discreet in their behaviour at sea, if travelling alone. Hastily-formed friendships at starting may put them into the most awkward positions afterwards. And this axiom is as applicable to friendships contracted with their own as with the other sex. An everyday character on board ship is the nice, well-dressed, lady-like woman who is all smiles and sweetness at first, all frowns and acid at last. She is, perhaps, one of those unphilosophic persons who are ever in pursuit of pleasure, never of content, and in that case she will lead the unwary of her sex into the social perils of a clique, of which she has probably constituted herself the ruling queen.

Now, clique friendship, that is to say, the friendship of a "set," is never to be relied upon on board ship. The characters of the persons composing the set are unknown to each other, and it is almost impossible under such a disadvantage that the harmony of the little circle can last. The swans begin to think one another geese, and once this occurs there is an end of the clique. The passengers who have held aloof from it, or have not been invited to join, now find it is their turn to laugh, and the lady who has allowed herself to be drawn into the clique has the shame of being justly commiserated by persons on whom she has turned the cold shoulder.

A reserved person, however, can seldom attain popularity on a voyage. A sea voyage, in these days of swift steamers, is not long enough to permit of his being understood. On the contrary, the prudent reserve of a person who does not wish to be entangled in undesirable friendships or intrigues, is very often set down to anything but the right reason. All sorts of mistakes—especially those of identity—are liable to occur on board great ocean steamships which take in stray passengers at different ports. Thus, it has come to pass that a very reserved person has been mistaken for the son of the hangman, because "he never spoke to nobody." And a lady who kept herself very much to herself, which was all the more aggravating because she was pretty, once travelled quite unconsciously over the Indian Seas as a Russian spy, when she was in fact only the wife of an English naval officer.

There are people who hold the opinion that when they are at sea everything is lawful to them in a social sense. It is needless to say that though they travel first-class, they are not first-class people. They seem to think that the sea sweeps away all social distinctions, and if there is any great personage on board they will go up and address him as coolly as if he were only a brother bagman. It is dreadful to have the distasteful friendship of one of this class forced upon one—especially if suffering from *mal de mer*. Often it is a woman, in the

guise of a good-natured, "motherly body." She is full of interest for her victim, and full of questions. She thinks he looks pale at breakfast, and advises him to take a mutton-chop. She banters him at dinner about the young lady he was playing chess with on deck, and very likely in the hearing of the young woman herself. If he is a lord, she enquires loudly across the table how his mother is; and in this way she takes possession of him bodily by right of the sea. He is flotsam and jetsam, whom it is lawful to annex, and the victim will bitterly repent the civility he offered such a person at the beginning, for all the rest of the voyage.

It is impossible to shake off the friendship of this particular class. It is the hug of the old man of the sea. One's quiet walks on deck, one's tranquil smoke after breakfast, one's siesta under the awning, one's novel, are all spoiled by the persistent friendship of the man who affects to be jolly and sociable at sea, and expects that others will be so likewise. The only way to get rid of this kind of friendship is to draw the man's caricature and leave it about. Vanity is his weak point, and this will wound it if anything can.

Of the same class is the spinster who is always drawing little drafts upon the kindness of her "friends." So, at least, she calls the acquaintance of a few days or a week. One would think this young lady had never a friend on shore, she makes so much of those she has aboard. It is always, "Oh, Mr. ——, will you be so kind?" or "Oh, dear, how stupid of me, but would you mind?" until the victims of her behests are actually run off their legs upon missions more or less trivial.

To offer to look for a box, or a handbag, for a damsel of this kind is as unsatisfactory as to make promises to Herodias' daughter. From that day forth, until the time when the propeller ceases from troubling, and the weary are at rest, the man who has so committed himself will no longer be a free agent. Under the guise of friendship, she will keep him running up and down, or sticking in the hatchways. He will go about with an everlasting workbox or shawl in his hand, and he will not dare to smoke without permission from his little tyrant. There is only one chance for him—that some other man will be as big a fool as himself. That would lighten his labours by one half.

The friendship of cabin chums, whether they happen to be young ladies or young men, is often of a very questionable character. To get on at all with the person who shares your privacy is no easy undertaking, because one naturally begins with disliking him. Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère? Then the great Christian principle of give and take is so often misinterpreted by cabin chums. It is related that there were once two—one a very High Church clergyman—who were bosom friends, until the one discovered his reverend companion improving his tonsure with the other's pet razor. After that they never spoke again, not even in bed.

If board-ship friendship can endure the test of cabin companion-

ship, it may be accepted as real and lasting for all time; but when we consider how very many more nasty people there are in the world than nice, and the long odds against ever getting one of the latter for a cabin companion, it is not so very surprising if the very last people to enjoy board-ship friendship are those boxed up together. Everyone who has had the misfortune to go a long voyage with an uncongenial cabin chum must remember his own relief when he got near the end of the journey.

This is the time when board-ship friendships are seen at their worst. The pretty woman, but old traveller, who has been so kind during the voyage as to let you sit next her at table, and order, and pay for, her champagne, is now so much engaged with her packing, and her letters, and her telegrams, as to find barely time to bid you Good-morning. The young lady whose board-ship friendship with the chief officer has been so much commented upon during the voyage, now discovers to her dismay that the deceiving sailor is a married man. Only the reserved person brightens up, and grows genial with the near termination of the voyage. There is no longer much danger of anyone presuming on *his* friendship to ask the favour of a small loan, and so he is at liberty to relax a little in view of his speedy separation from his fellow-passengers.

Less selfish persons, chiefly females, cling with desperate tenacity to the hope, a delusive one, that the mushroom friendships they have made on board will be carried on to Liverpool, London, or wherever they are all bound. The very sanguine among them go so far even as to ask the addresses of their friends on shore, but are met with evasive answers. The fact is that there is a lamentable tendency of weak human nature to shake off board-ship friendships as soon as it touches terra firma again. It is only the hardened traveller, however, who can actually cut his whilom cabin chum at the railway station, and ignore his presence at the table d'hôte, should they find themselves at the same hotel. Inexperienced persons—especially those from the Colonies—cling affectionately to one another to the very last, and make arrangements to go up to town in the same train, to live in the same hotel, and what not.

But it is utterly impracticable, for all this, to expect that fungus thing, board-ship friendship, to flourish anywhere but on board ship. The very phrase, "That? Oh, that is someone who came over with me in the *Leviathan*," is enough to indicate the fact. And though it is not denied that friendships have been begun on board ship that have lasted a life-time, such intimacies are the exception to the rule, for "Out of sight out of mind" is a maxim which is almost universally applicable to them.

F. E. W.

MISS OLDHAM'S CHOICE.

By the Author of "Adonais, Q. C."

MISS OLDHAM, all the time she had been driving along the Parade of Boroughbourne, had kept her clear blue eyes fixed dreamily on the dancing, sail-studded bay. Now that the open fly in which she was drew up at Brattley's, the principal draper's shop of the place, she got out and crossed the pavement into the shop.

Miss Oldham had the walk and the easy, natural dignity of an ideal queen. There was nothing *particularly* beautiful in her face—except, perhaps, the eyes—and yet she had a face in which there was a whole world of fascination imprinted somewhere. Amongst a crowd of others, it was the one which would have been almost certain to be remembered. The short Grecian nose; the sensitive lips; above all, the droop of the eyelids, and the dignified, direct expression of the clear eyes. The poise of the head was very dignified also;—and if one had happened to catch the tone of voice, that would have been remembered as well. It was clear and decided, like the look in the eyes.

At twenty-seven a woman's complexion is rarely her strong point; but Miss Oldham's complexion had never been anything but unnoticeable. She was not one of those enigmatical women who can look marvellously plain at one time, and at another time marvellously beautiful. No; with that expression in her eyes, and that poise to her head, she could never have looked plain. But beautiful? Fascinating and queenly, yes;—but there might have been two opinions as to whether she was actually beautiful.

It was late summer. Her warm-coloured, handsomely-made brown costume seemed to speak of the coming autumn leaves as she passed straight through the crowded shop to a distant counter. She glanced up and down it for an instant, then went a step or two farther along, and spoke to one of the shopmen.

"I will take that Indian silk with me now, if you please."

She certainly had a most distinct and bell-like utterance; but the shopman looked as thunderstruck and confused as if she had addressed him in an unintelligible dialect.

"The—Indian silk—madam?" he stammered.

"Yes," replied Miss Oldham, looking at the man.

She continued to look at him for another moment, and then parted her lips as if she were about to repeat her request for the silk. Just at that instant the man burst into a profuse torrent of apologies.

"Miss Oldham—madam—I beg your pardon; I understood you to say you had decided not to take the silk—I sold the two pieces

not ten minutes ago to another customer. I beg your pardon, Miss Oldham. I will at once telegraph to Liberty's for two more pieces of exactly the same shade."

A little spot of bright colour had burned suddenly into each side of Miss Oldham's face. She drooped her heavy eyelids for a moment, and raised her hand with an involuntary little movement to the pin at her throat.

"I fancied I had made myself perfectly understood," she remarked, coldly. "It is very strange."

"And I fancied I had done so, madam," the man answered. "I thought you said you would not take the silk; but that you would call in half an hour and choose something else. In all the bustle that goes on around, I must have misunderstood—I hope you will allow me to send to Liberty's."

Miss Oldham was very angry. The man was telling her the strict truth, and as she was a clever woman, she ought to have seen at once that it was so. As matters stood, however, she disbelieved him. What she did think simply was that she, being new to Boroughbourne, had been despoiled of her rightful purchase in order to suit the whim of an older and, perhaps, larger customer; and her soul revolted at the injustice. Besides, woman-like, she was vexed about the silk.

"You told me yourself," she said, "that that particular shade of dead-gold colour was most uncommon. You said if I wanted any more it would probably have to be specially dyed. I should find it very awkward to wait for that as I wanted the dress directly. Oh!—I see the silk is still there!"

The man turned round for it, and put it down on the counter before her.

"I have not had time even to parcel it up, madam," he said, with rather an offended air, seeing that he was disbelieved. "The gentleman bought it to send to his daughter in Germany, and he promised to come back and give me the young lady's correct address. Of course, if I had understood you to leave the matter even in indecision I should never have let the silk go. Perhaps some of our other shades might be equally satisfactory, madam."

The afternoon sun sparkled like a changing fire upon the brilliant silk. Miss Oldham's eyes clouded the more as she looked at it.

"If you were to explain the circumstances of the case to your customer," she remarked, still in the same cold manner, "I should think he could hardly refuse to let me have these pieces. Perhaps some of your other shades might be equally satisfactory to *him*."

As she spoke she had laid her parasol across the silk. She really had only done so in order that she might the more conveniently fasten a button of her glove; but it seemed to the man as if she were going to take possession of it, and his face grew actually pale with alarm.

"Oh, if you please, Miss Oldham," he said, hurriedly, "I can assure you that Dr. Werner would never allow ——"

He stopped dead short, for Miss Oldham had drawn herself up to her full height, and was looking at him. Whatever there was in that look it seemed utterly to deprive the man of the power of speech. For fully five seconds she kept her eyes fixed upon him; then she put her hand to her brooch, with the same involuntary little gesture as before, and an instant after took hold of the two pieces of Indian silk.

"I chose this silk, and gave orders that it should be entered to my account. The mistake, *if there was a mistake*, was on your part; and I think I am justified in considering that the silk belongs to me. I shall, therefore, take possession of it on my own responsibility; and, perhaps, you will be good enough to let Mr. Brattley and your customer know that I have done so. Good afternoon!"

An instant later she was walking easily through the bustling shop with the soft-glowing, golden silk thrown over her left arm. At the lace counter she paused, and looked critically at the Valenciennes and Honiton, even remarking with a smile to the shop girl behind that one could hardly tell now the imitation from the real lace; and yet the truth was she barely saw the laces: she was so angry; she was so angry.

Dr. Werner! Was she to be always haunted by this man? She counted, as she stood there, with a morsel of the airy-like fabric in her hand, how many times this man's individuality had been thrust upon her, since she had arrived six weeks ago at Boroughbourne. *Five times*, if she was not mistaken. She put the lace down, and taking up another bit, began to go over them in her mind.

First, there was the incident about the rooms at the hotel. After engaging them she went back to the station for her luggage, and at the door of the hotel again met the landlord. He was so sorry, but Dr. Werner had also arrived by that train—from a tour on the Continent. Dr. Werner always put up a night at this hotel on his arrival from the Continent, and always occupied these rooms; and as she was a stranger, etc., etc., he had taken the liberty—just for one night—of removing her to the other side of the passage. That was once.

Then she had wanted to hire a particular phaeton by the week, and a particular horse. The man regretted much that Dr. Werner often went out with them. That was twice.

A friend of hers had contributed something to the current number of the *Quarterly*, and she had left word at the circulating library, which she had joined, that immediately upon its arrival it should be sent to her. The next morning the librarian rather thought there must have been some mistake: at any rate the *Quarterly* always went first to Dr. Werner's. Three times.

Some friends had come down from London to see her, and she had ordered a dainty little supper for them from the French Cook of the hotel. At the supper everything was wrong; game burnt, meringues tasteless. The landlord was again profuse in his apolo

gies. The fact was, there was a great dinner at Barrington Crescent —at Dr. Werner's. Four times. And now this was the fifth !—Well, well, she almost laughed now ; and yet she was so angry.

She moved over to where there was a great display of gay ribbons. Each of the above incidents was trifling, of course ; but still each one had been very vexatious at the moment, and she had got to think that the whole of Boroughbourne bowed down in worship before Dr. Werner. She believed she had said something of this kind to the landlord of the hotel, the morning after the supper incident, and he had answered rather confusedly that Boroughbourne was proud Dr. Werner should have honoured it as his fixed place of residence ; and that Dr. Werner *was* a very popular gentleman.

" *Who* is Dr. Werner ? "

She put the question to him frigidly, just to see what the man would say ; for, of course, all the world knew the great metaphysician Werner. He hummed, and fidgeted, and finally replied that he had never heard Dr. Werner mentioned as being anything *but* Dr. Werner. A pang of amusement swept over her as she remembered that. Well, but her Indian silk ? No, no ; it was too much ! She turned rapidly away from the ribbons, and went towards the door. She was quite near it—upon the very threshold—and had called to mind that someone had surely mentioned to her Dr. Werner's great fondness for his one child—a daughter. That he was a widower she had heard certainly. She looked up and down for her open fly and just at the moment a voice spoke close to her ear.

" My Indian silk ! "

She wheeled round to find a gentleman on the step beside her staring fixedly down at the silk upon her arm. He was very tall and broad-shouldered, with a short, flaxen-coloured King Charles beard. Keen, dark blue eyes, peering out from under well-defined eyebrows of the same colour as his beard. Almost at the same instant as his exclamation he raised a pair of double eye-glasses quickly, and after casting one still more narrow look at the silk, bowed to Miss Oldham.

" Pardon me, madam," he said, with a slight foreign accent : " I fancied that, by some mistake possibly, you might have been carrying away—my Indian silk. A hundred pardons, madam. Some other pieces of silk, no doubt. Some mistake of the shop people—there were no other pieces probably. Pray pardon me."

As he finished speaking, he put up his eye-glass and peered into the silk again. Miss Oldham had adjusted it with a little movement of her dainty brown kid glove. The burning spot was on each cheek once again, but she raised her eyes with even a more haughtily direct look than usual.

" Am I speaking to Dr. Werner ? " she enquired, composedly.— The man met the eyes with his own, and appeared positively startled by them.

" I am Dr. Werner—yes," he answered, looking straight at her.

"Oh!" said Miss Oldham, and moved aside to let some people pass out of the shop. Then she looked again at Dr. Werner and continued: "I bought these two pieces of silk in this shop about half an hour since, and left word that I would call again for them. When I did so it transpired that through some unjustifiable mistake of the shop people they had been resold in the interim—to you. I am very sorry that such a mistake should have occurred, but—of course I retain possession of the silk."

"Ha," said Dr. Werner, again, and continued to study Miss Oldham.

"I am given to understand," she pursued, with the seemingly unavoidable little bridling movement of her throat, "that more material of the same description and of the same shade of colour may be procured with only some slight delay. I am sorry that I should find it impossible to wait for this material; but I am told that Mr. Brattley would be happy to order it. Good afternoon!"

Just as she was turning away, the man with the King Charles beard made a sudden step to confront her.

"But," said he, in a tone which gave out the idea of his having just remembered some small incidental point forgotten in the previous argument, "where are you going with my Indian silk?"

No words can describe Miss Oldham's surprise. She stood where she was, perfectly motionless, and simply looked at Dr. Werner; much as she had looked at the shopman not five minutes before. In Dr. Werner's case, however, it appeared to have a reanimating rather than any other effect. Miss Oldham had never been in such a position before. If she would have confessed it to herself, she wished now that she had left the silk alone.

"Dr. Werner," she replied, drawing herself up haughtily, "I have explained the matter to you as well as I am able. I bought the silk. I spoke to the shopman as distinctly as I am speaking to you now. There could be no misunderstanding on his part, and his error was unjustifiable. Good morning!"

Dr. Werner suddenly took off his hat and bowed almost reverentially to Miss Oldham.

"The destination of the Indian silk is decided. The mistake was indeed unjustifiable—and the Indian silk belongs to you."

Ten minutes later, Miss Oldham going up the broad staircase of the hotel at which she was staying, looked down with unusually troubled eyes upon her left arm, and muttered half aloud: "He also said that it was unjustifiable." Had she begun already, like the rest of Boroughbourne, to be swayed by Dr. Werner? Just about the same time, Dr. Werner's horses swept round the corner of Barrington Crescent, and stopped at the foot of his own steps. As he got out, and went up them, he remarked aloud, so that the footman heard him, and repeated it in the kitchen: "Beautiful woman! Still more beautiful, no doubt, in my Indian silk."

He had evidently ranged himself amongst those who *did* consider Miss Oldham positively beautiful.

Miss Oldham had not come to Boroughbourne without introductions; but the Boroughbourne season was only just commencing, so that people were only beginning to arrive there now. Besides that, she had been busy looking out for a house, and had never even had time to think of presenting her introductions.

Miss Oldham was not a rich widow; but she was what ought to have been just as popular: a rich unmarried lady with nobody in all the world to say her yea or nay. Her mother had been dead many long years; and her father—an indigo planter in Ceylon—had died immediately upon his arrival in England, his native country, after an absence of forty years abroad. That took place when Miss Oldham was twenty-three. Her father's death was a terrible blow. They were so fond of each other, and they had been looking forward for years to this coming home, where they were to be so gay and happy. Circumstances had prevented their settling in England sooner; and strange to say, although Miss Oldham had been educated on the Continent, she had never put foot on English soil. Perhaps, after all, it was not so strange when one remembered that Mr. Oldham was a self-made man, entirely without relations.

After the first bitterness of her father's loss was beginning to pass away a little, it seemed to her that if she had only had one—only one—relation, however poor, that she could have turned to, it would at least have been better than this desolation. And then as Old Time still rolled on, and something like her former gaiety of spirit came back to her—for she was still young and vigorous—she bethought herself of all the packets of introductions her father had brought over with him. Let a man be self-made as he may, he is not a millionaire for nothing. Only another short year found Miss Oldham plunged in a whirl of gaiety.

She began by engaging an elderly lady as a chaperon, and plodded patiently through a long relay of elderly ladies; until at twenty-six, despairing of ever finding one she could be happy with, she resolved to brave the world alone. Whether it was that Miss Oldham was unlucky, or whether she really had the grave fault of not being able to get on well with elderly companions, it is impossible to say; but at any rate, at twenty-six, she began to live alone. For a young and handsome woman, with a less clear look in her eyes, and less haughty poise to her head, the plan might not have been so feasible; but for her there seemed to be no great difficulty rising in the way. At twenty-seven, somehow or other, the phantasy seized her that above all things she should like to hire a furnished house at Boroughbourne. So she had come down here and taken rooms in the hotel, and begun to look out for a house. Yes, but the business was to find one to suit her—for Miss Oldham was fastidious.

Ah, it is a sad thing for any woman to live alone. Miss Oldham would far better have gone on enduring the elderly companions. The world never knew it, but many a hot tear welled forth from the clear eyes, in the gorgeous privacy of her sitting-room ; for a woman, after all, *must* be a woman. It was not that Miss Oldham cared a bit about the money, but she did hate to be cheated; and everybody, just because she was a woman and alone, seemed so ready to take advantage of her. All the furnished houses were either too dear or too dirty ; and all the house agents either snarled or smirked ; and all the world had at least one friend in whom to confide its troubles—except Miss Oldham. No wonder the blue eyes clouded sometimes—when there was nobody but the little blue shepherdesses on the mantelpiece to see.

It was just one week after the incident about the Indian silk and Miss Oldham, as usual, was on the hunt for houses. It was a beautiful, clear, sunny afternoon, but more oppressively warm than the other one had been, and she was driving rapidly along the white, unshaded streets, trying vainly to obtain something like coolness under a dainty, green parasol. Her face looked paler than usual, partly on account of the greenish shade, and partly that she was very tired. She had orders to see three houses, but as the fly stopped, and she got out, she said to herself that though this was only the second, it would be the last she would visit to-day at all events. Then she went slowly up the steps and rang the bell.

She looked well up and down the outside of the house, as she had got into the way of doing, and approved of it. Three stories high and attics; and a nice balcony, festooned by bright-blossomed creepers. Well, this, at last, was just what she wanted, if the inside was only as nice, and if they were not asking too extravagant a sum for it. It was not at all that she was unable to pay any sum however extravagant, but only that she objected to do so for the seemingly tacitly understood reason that she was both lonely and rich. As she stood there, her delicate-coloured, airy-like French dress seemed to combine with the almost unseasonably hot day to make one dream of the departing summer. When the door opened she glanced again at the paper in her hand.

"I have an order to see this house on Tuesday, between the hours of four and six. I suppose it is convenient for me to go over it to-day?"

The footman threw a surprised glance at the order and one of respectful admiration at Miss Oldham.

"I am afraid, ma'am, there must be some mistake."

Miss Oldham studied the order attentively again, and put this down to another of the strange eccentricities of Boroughbourne.

"There is no mistake," she said, almost patiently. "The order of admittance is regularly drawn out for this house. I have no wish to see anything further to-day than the drawing-room and dining-room.

Here is my card. Will you be good enough to enquire whether it is convenient?"

"Certainly, ma'am," replied the man, somewhat abashed by the grand air of this lady. He disappeared into the house, and, meantime, Miss Oldham cast her eyes round, and also approved of the hall. Her quick glance discerned at once that these buffalo antlers over the inner door would have been better, less prominently placed, more to the side; but that, she assured herself, could be easily done; and then she fell to admiring the cornice. The footman had gone straight through this hall into another; and then, having opened a heavy door to the left, went softly across a thick, velvet-pile carpet, to where a gentleman was writing at a table.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he began, apologetically, "but, if you please, a lady insists on examining the house. She says she has an order to see over it. I think there must be some mistake."

"What!" exclaimed the writer, laying down his pen and putting out his hand for the card the footman was holding. "See over my house! Very obliging of the lady." And then he stared for a long time at the card.

"There must be some mistake, sir," the footman again ventured at last. "The lady mentioned she would wish to see nothing further than the dining-room and drawing-room."

"Very considerate of the lady," was the reply. "But show her in, if you please." And then he returned at once to his writing.

The footman disappeared noiselessly in quest of the lady. The writer at the desk made no change in his position; and there was no change on his face, except for the appearance of a faint smile hovering about the corners of his mouth. The smile was still there when he rose, as the door opened once again. There was a momentary blank pause of amazement on the part of the lady, who had just come in; then an exclamation in a tone which said a good deal more than amazement.

"Dr. Werner!"

He bowed and moved a small chair towards her, and, after another slight pause, she mechanically sat down. He seated himself, too, upon the sofa opposite to her.

"I think," said he, "that you wish to see the house."

Miss Oldham had begun to recover herself a little and to wonder how the mistake in the order could have arisen.

It was a strange thing, but that same order positively trembled in her hand, as if reverberating from some shock; and Miss Oldham's hand was little given to trembling. She put it down on her knee, and answered very quietly:

"I only wanted to have a momentary glance at the drawing-room and dining-room to-day—nothing further. I am rather tired. I find the sun so oppressive."

Dr. Werner stretched out his long arm behind him and quietly pulled down the dark green blind.

"That is because you have been making too much use of it. One requires to be discreet, even in the use of the sunshine."

It seemed as if Miss Oldham were still paler than she had been before. Few people, looking at her just then, could have denied that she was positively beautiful.

"Yes," she answered, quickly; "I am very tired of it."

He turned, and put the pen he still held softly down upon the blotting-paper, and rested his hand upon the corner of the dark oak table as he spoke. It was a very white hand, and a beam of sunshine, coming through a chink of the Venetian blind, glowed upon the diamond in his ring, making a sudden pale illumination. "One ought never to get tired of the sunshine," he answered, gravely. "It is one of those external influences whose vivifying power should never lose its hold on us. Many a dark deed has remained undone under the influence of a sudden burst of sunshine. And one can hardly be astonished at it. I can never see a dull brooding day flash out with sunlight, but I breathe more freely. I put on my hat and go out in it; or perhaps I go out on the steps and bathe my head in the sparkling light, without even taking time to put on my hat. In spite of myself, I seem to have a personal knowledge of some dark series of tragedies averted—at all events for the moment. Of course, you will say that it is only upon impressionable people such an influence could be exercised. Yes, that is true; but how many impressionable people there are, after all, even here amongst *your* people. Go over your own acquaintances in your mind, and you will find that you know so many. Amongst *my* people, we are all impressionable, at any rate to the sunshine. Perhaps, it is only because it matches the colour of our hair."

It was a strange opening for a business conversation; and perhaps it occurred to Dr. Werner that it was so, for he ended with a smile.

Miss Oldham, however, was not smiling. All unconsciously he had struck the chords of many strange sympathies. His low, musical voice had thrilled her. Then it suddenly seemed to dawn upon her that this was only a business interview. A faint blush had been creeping slowly over her pale face; and now she raised herself slightly in her chair, in a little way which seemed to proclaim that here was enough of polite conversation. Ah, but there was no longer any use in thinking of that; there was no longer any possibility of purely polite conventionalities betwixt them. A touch or two upon a common chord of sympathy had made them friends.

"Thank you, Dr. Werner," she said, quietly, casting her eyes around her: "I shall never again complain of the sunshine. Is this the study?"

Miss Oldham made a thorough examination of the lower part of the house. She was not the woman to sign a contract under any circumstances without being sure that she was acting wisely. After the study came the drawing and dining-rooms, and even a grave inspection of the butler's pantry—preceded always by Dr. Werner.

Well, this house would do at last; she was sure of it. When she had satisfied herself of that, and bid Dr. Werner good-bye, she took a long, long drive round by the side of the blue sparkling sea. The sun was seemingly hotter than ever, but she actually lowered her parasol, and lay back amidst the cushions to bask in it. This woman with the clear dignified eyes was feeling happier than she had done for years. Perhaps it was only that she had been so fortunate about the house, but at any rate it was so. She drove on, out into the wooded country. Little startled rabbits darted over the white road—high up some whin-covered bank, or again deep into the unfathomable looking dens. The trees interlaced over the road. Birds sang amongst them everywhere, or sprang into startled flight, like the rabbits. When at last she came out from the woods, by a long, circular sweep, into the sight of the sea again, the first faint tinge of ruby upon the laughing blue waves announced the approaching sunset.

The end of the bay at which she had come out was studded with odd little brown rocks, dotted over with clumps of the red sea daisies; and here the water was of a dull green, untroubled, except for a rush, every now and again, of foam; and all round this part there was an occasional odd, swirling, flopping sound, almost like a sob. By the time she reached Boroughbourne, and was driving once more along the Parade, the sea, the sands, and the white town were all literally glowing in the resplendent ruby colour. She stood upon the steps of the hotel, and looked at them all. She thought, as she stood there, that for some reason—she hardly knew what reason—she would remember this afternoon as one of the very happiest she had ever known. She went slowly upstairs to her private sitting room, still with the rare, rare sensation of peaceful contentment at her heart; and going over to the table, opened first one, then another, of the two notes lying waiting for her.

The first one ran thus:

"Miss Oldham.—Madam,—We regret to say that your order for admittance to 9, *Barrington Crescent* was a mistake for 9, *Burlington Crescent.* Apologising for the error, we remain, madam, respectfully yours, "Jones and Seabury."

And the second was this:

"Dear Miss Oldham,—In allowing you to see over my house, I yielded to an irresistible, but I suppose, unpardonable impulse; for I was necessarily aware there must be some mistake. I regretted the impulse the moment I had yielded to it; and yet it would be untrue to say that I regret it now. Please try to forgive me. Ever yours sincerely, "Frank Werner."

Forgive! Forgive! Ah, how little—she cried it to herself passionately—how little he knew her! Forgive! If he could have

seen the wounded pride in her eyes, just then, he would hardly have dared to expect it. The sunset was still beaming in through the open window, but Miss Oldham shivered as she sat in it; and it seemed, through the dizzing of her ears, as if she heard once again, quite distinctly, the sobbing sound she had listened to around the rocks at the other side of the Bay.

"Miss Oldham—Dr. Werner."

It was the first reception she had gone to, and she had only just entered the room when her hostess made the introduction. There was time neither for thought nor action on her part. Perhaps it was only the shock of meeting with one who had so insulted her—for she had never remembered that Dr. Werner might possibly frequent receptions; or, perhaps, she was considering what was the bitterest thing she could say in return for such an insult; but, at any rate, she stood perfectly still beside him, a deep flush on her fair face. Her soft, gold-coloured dress and amber ornaments glowed in the lamp light. He was standing perfectly motionless also. All of a sudden he changed his position again, and cast his eyes down on her.

"Ah," he sighed—"my Indian silk!"

It was the little straw which turned the scale. The flush deepened on Miss Oldham's face, but her lips parted in a smile. How it happened neither of them could have told, but a minute later they had fallen easily into a quiet talk upon general subjects. And it was only a week ago that Miss Oldham had sat down with the suffocating pain of wounded pride bringing a new shamed look into her eyes; and the sobbing sound of the sea seemed to be deafening her. Ah, it is all very well for a woman to *intend*—a feather weight of chance, a smile even, and she forgets the very nature of her intentions. All the rustling silks and satins, all the rose-coloured lamps, every cushion and knicknack in the long drawing-room—what was the matter with them that they were different from any such that she had ever seen before? She appeared to mark out every detail of each of them only with a casual glance; just as she had marked out all the details of the woods and the rocky bay last week. She seemed to bask in the sparkling sunshine again, the pale lamp-light was changed into it. She was verily surprised at her own feelings, and tried to analyse them; wondering if there was anything going wrong with her head.

As the evening advanced, the colour of her expressive eyes seemed to deepen, and their brilliancy was replaced by a steady, clear, quiet light. She had analysed her feelings by that time; she knew now what was the matter with them. A ray of last week's sunshine had been smouldering all the time at her heart, and now it had found its way out at last! How long would it shine? When would the clouds come to obscure it? It was the question which was ringing in her ears, the thought which changed the brilliancy into quiet light.

It was a pity that she troubled even to consider it. That very

evening Dr. Werner answered it for her. That very evening Dr. Werner offered her the house, 9, Barrington Crescent, and all that was in it—*and himself*—in exchange once more for—the Indian silk! And how *could* Miss Oldham refuse a second time to give up that Indian silk?

Miss Oldham accepted the offer. It was after she had accepted it, upon the steps, in the dusky, quiet night, that she suddenly asked Dr. Werner when the clouds would come.

And he answered, just as suddenly, with his arms around her:

"Never."

HOUSEHOLD NAMES.

Ah, dearer still is the household name,
As the swift years onward flow,
Which sweetly once from the dear lips came
That grew silent long ago.
And now our faces are homeward set,
How dear to our longing ears,
Have grown those voices that call us yet
By the names of our youthful years!

All tossed apart is our kindred band,
Like boats on a stormy sea,
Though we all set sail for the self-same land
In whose haven we long to be;
But spent and weary, we onwards row
Our welcome sweet to claim,
For faintly still on each storm-worn prow,
Is written a household name.

Oh, mother, gone home so long ago,
You have pleaded for us in prayer,
Till our household names the angels know—
They are spoken so often there!
And there'll be great joy in Heaven one day,
When over the pale sea foam
All frail and shattered, and drenched with spray,
The last of your boats comes home.

Helen Marion Burnside.

THE OLD STONE CROSS.

By the Author of "Ninety Years Ago."

I.

IN a little village or commune in the South of Brittany, a few miles from Vannes, stood a picturesque stone farm-house called St. Ebven.

The old grey walls were sheltered from the blaze of the sun, that in Brittany seems always to shine, by large chestnut trees now in full flower. It was a rough-looking building, this farm of St. Ebven, scarcely removed from any of the cottages round as far as appearance went.

Farmer Pichon was a well-to-do Breton peasant, and the farm of which he was owner had been in his family since the days of the good Duchess Anne, as Maître Pichon would proudly assert. With his portly wife and daughters and his two sons, the farmer made a good living out of his land, tilling and working hard. Madame Pichon and her daughters attended the weekly market at Vannes, where they found a ready sale for their produce, and a day's gossip. Indeed, by Madame herself, as well as by Jeanne and Barbe, this weekly expedition to the town was looked forward to with excitement.

St. Ebven was the most important house in the commune; many of the other habitations being merely the residence of the poor peasants.

A pretty sight it was on a market day to see the Breton farmer and his family starting for Vannes. Maître Pichon, in his Sunday best, the large black hat, contrasting well with the white jacket; his blue breeches the one bit of colour in his attire; the dark hair and olive complexion of the wearer, with the long sad eyes and straight nose, the almost universal characteristic of the Morbihan Breton, made, even without the adjuncts of the two pretty damsels and the commanding maîtresse, a picture alone.

Madame Pichon looked proudly at her girls on these festive days, for Jeanne and Barbe were always in full dress. The white cap suiting the blue eyes of the elder girl, Jeanne, to perfection. She was fair and bright. Barbe, on the contrary, was, like her parents and her two brothers, dark and very handsome. Jeanne Pichon resembled none of her relations; in fact she was in no way like a Breton. Her eyes were blue as the sky, her hair was of a golden brown, and on her cheeks shone a delicate pink like a rose. It was no wonder that good Maître Charles Pichon was proud of these fair girls. Some folks shook their heads, saying Maître Pichon might find out one day that it did not answer to spoil children.

One morning in early spring, under a lovely and cloudless blue sky, the family were on their way to Vannes, in their roomy and swift market conveyance, the farmer driving. The party had been talking and discussing their plans in the most lively way, until within a mile or so of the town; when, as usual, silence fell on them until they should have passed the "Dolmen."

A dolmen is an old Druidical remain, a stone formerly used in their religious rites. Down even to the present realistic days, the Bretons retain a superstitious awe of these weird old stones so plentifully strewing their land.

Left well behind them and the town of Vannes in view, its old gables and ancient walls shining out clear and white, the tongues of the travellers were unlocked again.

"Soon be there now, mes enfants," Maître Charles remarked; his dark eyes brightening; "n'est-ce pas?"

"Si, mon père. If we sell my eggs well, and all Barbe's chickens, then you promised us each a new pair of earrings, you know."

Père Pichon laughed; he never could be angry with Jeanne.

"Ah! whom have we here?" he asked, quickly, pulling up, as a young man suddenly turned, laying a light hand on the horse's long grey mane.

A tall youth he, in the Breton dress, with rows and rows of silver buttons down his white jacket, and a smile on his handsome brown face. Gaston Michel's dark eyes looked very brilliant this spring morning, what with the fine weather and what with the meeting.

"C'est toi, Gaston! On thy way to Vannes?" Mère Pichon asked, in a friendly voice.

Gaston nodded, holding up a large basket of rich and creamy butter to show his errand.

"There's money there, mon ami," Jeanne said, in her laughing voice.

"I can buy the gold cross you wanted for next 'Pardon,'" Gaston Michel in a low whisper answered quickly, putting one strong brown hand upon Jeanne's fair one.

The girl blushed, and turned her head away from the young Breton's too admiring gaze. But she forgot to take away her hand.

Mère Pichon's ears were quick. "What's that you are saying about a gold cross, Gaston?" she interrupted, in a peremptory tone. "No, no; keep your money, and don't waste it."

"Right lad, keep it; money comes in none too quickly," the farmer added, kindly. Jerking the reins, he drove on; Jeanne and Barbe waving their hands, and in Breton dialect telling the youth they would meet again in the market.

Once inside the walls of Vannes, business was the order of the day. Bustling and jostling through the streets, the Pichons hastened to take their accustomed stand. There, amidst a quick and lively sale, varied

and kept from monotony by interchange of conversation with neighbours, the day passed only too quickly—to Jeanne at least—for Gaston Michel had soon joined the party.

"I've bought the cross, my Jeannette," Gaston whispered, when he could gain her ear, as they were all preparing to depart. "I shall ask Père Gildas to bless it; then I give it thee."

Gaston's eyes were looking what he did not say, when two more young men came up; one of them so like Gaston Michel as to show that he must be his brother. The other was Alain Mauclerc.

A frown gathered on the handsome face of the younger Michel, as Pierre, the elder brother, a very stalwart man, made straight for Jeanne's side and began whispering to her; while young Mauclerc devoted himself to helping the good mère to pack up her empty baskets.

Gaston Michel did not like the turn affairs were taking; and not for the first time. Jeanne was his; Pierre was welcome to Barbe; but no one should make love to Jeanne, except himself. Had he not always loved her, and meant to marry her some day? What the diable did Pierre want interfering with her? He was always doing it now.

This was rather hard on Pierre, for he likewise loved the pretty blue-eyed Jeanne Pichon; and he had, equally with Gaston, resolved to win her for his bride. Alike in appearance, the two brothers were unlike in disposition.

In one thing only were they agreed; in their love for the fair Breton girl.

II.

The middle of the week following Mère Pichon sat in her doorway spinning, when she became aware of a shadow coming between her and the sunlight. Looking up, she saw the tall, slight, yet athletic form of the younger Michel beside her.

"Bonjour, mon ami," the good woman said in a hearty voice. Gaston returned the salutation, and asked if Jeanne were in.

"Toujours Jeanne! You have thoughts for no one but her," replied the mother, with a shake of her head.

"May I take her for a walk?" he demanded, with his bright smile. "It is such a fine afternoon—look, madame—you cannot say me nay," he added, coaxingly.

Mère Pichon told him he was a cunning knave; but if he could find Jeanne he might take her.

Gaston started off; soon returning with the object of his visit. In a few minutes the young couple were out of sight. Mère Pichon, shaking her head sagely, recommenced her spinning with a self-reflecting word: "Eh, bien! you were young once, mère."

Gaston Michel and Jeanne strolled on in the sunlight; sheltered from the glare by the cool chestnut trees now in all their beauty. It

was an unusual pleasure for them to be alone together ; for in Brittany it is not considered quite the right thing.

"This is paradise, sauntering down these lanes with you, ma mie," Gaston said in tender tones. And Jeanne's blue eyes danced with pleasure as she heard. It was indeed paradise to walk thus with Gaston.

But they were not talkative ; in fact, except now and then, neither spoke at all. Still there was no doubt they were enjoying their unusual holiday.

Presently Gaston drew his companion into a wider track. Taking her by the hand, he led her silently through a chestnut grove ; till, deep in the shelters of a cool glade, they stood before a large stone cross, or crucifix. Unloosing the girl's hand and going nearer, he threw his arms round the crucifix.

"There!" he exclaimed, triumphantly, as he unclasped them. "I can just do it. Did you see, Jeanne? You will be mine, my love, won't you?" and the young Breton turned his speaking face with the glad light in the usually grave eyes, on the blushing girl.

She did not pretend to misunderstand him. In this district of Brittany, when a youth can clasp the old stone Cross, he is said to be old enough to marry. With her fair face turned to him and her blue eyes fixed on his, she gave her answer.

"I will, mon ami."

Gaston, took both her hands in one of his. Holding them tightly, he raised his broad hat with the other, and spoke solemnly in a clear tone : "Bon Jésu, make me worthy of her!"

Then the two, kneeling by the old stone Cross, plighted their troth, imploring the blessing of the Bon Dieu upon their future.

Once, as boy and girl, Jeanne and Gaston had stood by this same old stone ; there the boy had told the girl laughingly that she should be his little wife as soon as he could get both arms round the crucifix. And then once again, Gaston, with Jeanne at his side, had come to the Chestnut Wood. But, no ; the young Breton's arms were still not long enough to clasp the cross.

Yet once more now, on this lovely spring evening, the two presented themselves before the time-worn and honoured emblem. And Gaston, grown to manhood, put his strong arms round the cross. Jeanne Pichon was his.

With slow steps they left the shady and sequestered grove, looking back to the last. The sun, slanting down through the leaves, seemed to impart life to the still, carved form hanging on the old Cross.

"You tremble, my Jeanne!" the young lover spoke, as he felt the hand he held quiver. "Why?"

"I am afraid of Pierre," she answered.

"Of Pierre! Why of him?"

"Ah, mon ami, you do not know all," sighed the girl. "Pierre swears I shall marry him. Or else—I dare not think of it."

"You are going to marry me ; not Pierre," Gaston replied, trying

to speak lightly, for in truth he knew how vindictive his brother was. "Have you not just promised before the good Christ that you will be mine—my own dear wife? Courage, my dear."

"I tremble when I think of him. He says he will murder you if I marry you," Jeanne whispered, between her sobs.

The Breton uttered some fierce invective. "Let him try," he said to Jeanne.

The sun's rays were getting low when Jeanne re-appeared at St. Ebven. To judge by her bright face, her lover's words must have reassured her, and his parting caress was a sweet one.

A storm in the meantime had been brewing at the farm. Mère Pichon's usually kind and comely face wore a portentous frown. It darkened when she saw her elder daughter.

"Jeanne," she said, "I cannot have you trifling with that Michel youth. I hear he is but laughing at thee; he is in truth betrothed to Annette Ferrier, the rich heiress in Vannes."

Jeanne looked at her mother in amazement. What could she mean? Gaston could not trifle!

"Who has told you this, mother?" she asked, quietly.

"Pierre Michel, his brother. He has been here, and he told me that Gaston could but be playing with thee, when in sooth he is promised to Annette. Pierre, ma fille, loves you himself; he waits but our consent to ask your hand."

Jeanne laughed; a scornful, angry laugh.

"You don't believe him! He is a vaurien, a scélérat—va!" the girl burst out.

"Well, I am not going to say but that thy father and I prefer Gaston," admitted Madame Pichon. "But ——"

"Mother, listen to me for one moment: Gaston and I are betrothed. We have been to the old Cross, now, this very afternoon; he can get his arms round it, and I have promised him before Heaven, to be his wife. You will not deny it—you will say yes?" And Jeanne threw herself down on her knees before her mother.

"Stay, stay, mon enfant; tu vas trop vîte. Tell me more quietly all about you and Gaston."

Jeanne, relieved to find by her mother's tones she was not angry with her, told her everything. Mère Pichon had not been blind; she had known of the love the two young people had for each other; but like her daughter, she feared the elder Michel. Vindictive, sullen, and morose, Pierre was an object of dislike and dread to the whole village.

The good woman, remembering the days when she had been young herself, dismissed her daughter with her blessing, together with a promise that she would break the news to her father. Jeanne left the house in search of her sister, when suddenly Pierre Michel stood in the path. She would have passed him without speaking, but Pierre was not so minded.

"Bon soir, Mamselle Jeannette," he said, with a grim smile. "Why so quick to avoid me?"

"You ask that!—when you know you have been trying to poison my mother's ear against Gaston!" returned the girl, indignant tears springing to her eyes.

Pierre gazed at her in silence. "Si, si," he then said, in the guttural Breton accents. "And more than that would Pierre Michel do to win Jeanne Pichon."

"You think I am to be won by such low means?"—a world of scorn and hatred in her voice. "Tiens, I would not marry you, Pierre Michel, though there were no such person as Gaston in the whole land of Brittany." And as Jeanne drew herself up proudly, Gaston's cross shone conspicuously on her breast.

The Breton's dark face wore an angry look; a fierce fire leaped into his eyes, his frame shook.

"We'll see that, ma belle! You shall not marry Gaston. I would shoot him at the very altar." And, with these words, shaking his fist savagely, Pierre disappeared.

Frightened and excited, Jeanne returned home. But she said nothing of her rencontre with Pierre Michel.

III.

THE good priest, Père Gildas, had just celebrated early mass in his little church, and was leaving the sacristry to return to breakfast. When about to close the door, his sight was attracted by a man kneeling near the altar of Notre Dame de Secours. His head was bent low on his hands, his body was heaving with low stifled sobs. The priest felt sure he saw one of his flock in some trouble.

He went gently up to the kneeling figure, and laying a hand on the bent head, he spoke softly. "Are you in tribulation, mon fils?"

The man raised his face, and the Père recognised Gaston Michel.

"What is it?" he asked, kindly.

"You cannot help me, mon père," Gaston replied, rising at the same time from his knees.

"Give me the chance," smiled the good father. But Gaston shook his head.

Père Gildas led the young man away, and brought him to his small but pretty cottage. "Le café, Marcelle—vite," he called out to an old woman in the tiny garden, as he entered.

"Oui, oui, mon père." And old Marcelle hastened to bring in the Curé's frugal breakfast.

Not till his visitor had drunk some hot coffee and broken his fast, and, refreshed by the food and cheered by the kindness, looked a trifle less dejected, did the good father resume his questioning. Gaston spoke of what the priest already knew: his betrothal to Jeanne beneath the old Cross. He now told of his elder brother's

mad jealousy, and of his vow to kill him if he persisted in marrying her.

The Père listened to the sad tale with pitying eyes. "You mean to marry Jeanne Pichon? You are sure she loves you best? But I need not ask that," he added; "I know it." Père Gildas had known all his flock from their cradles, all the younger members at least, and cared for each individually.

"It seems to me," the simple-minded priest said, "as if this trial came straight from the Bon Dieu."

Gaston smiled sadly; he could not see it in that light; and the Père always did say everything came from the Bon Dieu.

"Perhaps it is to try your patience, my son; to make you more gentle."

"I do try to be patient, mon père. I have reasoned with Pierre, and gently too. I tell him if Jeanne likes *him* best she shall marry him."

"What does Pierre say to that?"

"Ah, mon père, he only showers curses on me; he swears he will murder me at the very altar."

Gaston shivered; the Curé looked sad. This seemed a case almost beyond him. But he did what he could, consoling and advising by turns; and when at length Gaston took his leave, it was with a less heavy heart than he had brought with him.

The days passed on. Spring changed into summer, and summer, in its turn, glided into autumn. And Jeanne and Gaston were not yet married, for the girl had such a dread of the jealous Pierre's carrying out his dreadful threat that she could not be persuaded to name the day.

Poor Gaston! Poor Jeanne! These were sad days for both of them. The patience Father Gildas had enjoined was indeed required in these weeks and months of waiting.

"The Bon Dieu and the Holy Christ have forsaken us!" the young lovers often lamented, sadly, to one another.

Michel the elder still persecuted Jeanne to marry him. Irritated beyond endurance at her steadfast determination not to answer him on this subject, he never left her without assurances so wicked that the girl shuddered even to *think* of his threats.

"Ma pauvre Jeannette: I am so grieved for thee!" Barbe said one day. "He *is* a mauvais, is Pierre. Were I you, ma sœur, I would marry Gaston, and, bah! not give the scélérat a thought."

Jeanne could not help laughing at the spirited sentiment.

Barbe went on: "I may be married, after all, before you, Jeanne. The Bagvalan* came here a few days ago, and we all know what that means. It is not for nothing he comes. Then I and Ursule Rohan have visited the holy Ufévrière twice this year, and both my pin

* The marriage merchant of the Bretons, usually a tailor.

and Ursule's stuck at once in her foot. Now Anne Ferrier tried twice. No, her pins fell out, for all her grand dot."

The kind Sainte Ufévrière was the patroness of the young girls, and was supposed to smile, or not, upon their projects of marriage.

"Is it Alain Mauclerc, Barbe?"

"Mais oui; who but he—bless his beau visage!" returned the light-hearted Barbe, dancing round her sister. Then, remembering herself, she threw her arms round poor Jeanne's neck and burst into a flood of tears.

"Jeannette, my darling, I love you so! I can't bear to think you are unhappy; nor can Alain."

"You cannot help us, Barbe. No one can but the Bon Dieu, and it looks as if He had forgotten us—though the Père says it is wrong to say so."

"The Bon Dieu never forgets one of his children who trust in Him," Barbe answered sadly.

"It is no use talking about our trouble, my Barbe," concluded Jeanne. "It is upon us, and we must bear it."

IV.

In a low room in one of the rude cottages of the district, a wood fire, mixed with dried seaweed, burning smokily on a rough hearth, a large yellow dog lazily warming himself by the red embers, there sat the two brothers Michel at breakfast.

A very silent pair were they. An angry scowl distorted the face of the elder; his black eyes lowered angrily as he now and then glanced furtively upwards. Gaston's eyes were bent on his breakfast, which he was eating as fast as he could. That despatched, he rose from his chair, and stood facing his brother.

"Pierre, I must speak. I cannot bear this persecution any longer. I mean to fix our wedding-day, and keep to it. It will be of no use your trying to stop the marriage."

Gaston spoke very quietly; he was determined not to lose his temper. But his mind was made up; this state of things must end. He could not see his Jeannette grow paler and thinner day by day.

Pierre Michel did not answer for some minutes. Then, with angry, passionate vehemence, he bade his brother please himself. If he insisted on marrying Jeanne Pichon he would not leave the church alive.

"I'll shoot you with my own hands; I have said it—and I mean it—so marry Jeanne at your peril," he raved, bringing his clenched fist down on the table with a force that made the crockery rattle, and the dog start up with a growl. Then, not waiting for any rejoinder, Pierre seized his hat, and rushed out of the cottage, banging the door after him.

The younger Michel remained standing where he was; the violence of his brother had frightened him. What was he to do? It

was hard to give up the girl he loved ; it was hard for her to be told she must marry another—whom she could not love. Yet, if Pierre fulfilled his threat, he, Gaston, was a dead man.

And Pierre always kept his word.

Poor Gaston ! he was very sorrowful, and his heart was like lead. He went about his daily work, feeling as if the spirit had gone out of him and he were turned to stone. Things looked so black !

The morning passed slowly away. When Gaston came in for the noonday meal, Pierre had not returned. For this he was glad. He felt too mad with misery to face so bad a brother.

The afternoon also passed ; night came. The quiet autumn moon shone on the little Breton cottage ; shone on the Breton youth as he tossed uneasily on his bed, courting the sleep that refused to come. Pierre had not returned. Morning dawned ; but no Pierre. Gaston wondered ; and began to imagine all sorts of things.

At noon, just as he came in for dinner, he suddenly noticed several of the villagers coming towards the cottage, bearing a burden. Hastening out, he recognised the motionless form of his brother.

" Mon pauvre Gaston," began one of the men ; " we found him lying on his face close by the large dolmen on this side Vannes. He must have been thrown from his horse, the jadis bête ! He is very bad, and senseless."

Gaston helped to place him on the box bed, made as soft as possible with some hay under the quilt, and the men ran off for the doctor.

Gaston sat by the bedside. No doctor was required to tell him that his brother would never rise again from where they had laid him. Death was marked in every feature. The cold dew-drops standing on the forehead, the laboured breathing were too sure evidence that there would be no recovery for Pierre Michel.

Now and again the lips moved, and the patient watcher caught some broken words, of which he could make nothing. When the médecin arrived, he saw at a glance that his skill could effect nothing.

" A few hours, mon ami, and all will be at an end," he whispered, pityingly, to Gaston. He had been thrown from his horse ; his head was hurt, and he had sustained severe internal injuries.

The busy médecin took his departure ; he had other cases to attend to, other lives to try to save ; and Père Gildas came in.

Gaston's face brightened when he saw the kindly face in the doorway, surmounted by its worn shovel hat. The Curé advanced to the bedside, and made the sign of the cross over the wounded man.

Perhaps Pierre had not been unconscious the whole time, or may be the priest's kind face brought him back for a space ; for the dying Breton opened his large, dark eyes, and muttered some words. " Dolmen—Jeanne—mourir," were all they could catch.

" The horse was frightened and threw you, is that what you would say ? " Father Gildas asked.

Pierre signed assent.

"You want to know if you will die—is that it?" continued the priest. And the frightened, supplicating look in the large eyes was answer enough.

The priest gravely told him—what indeed the dying man could not fail to know—that the doctor gave no hope.

"You will ask pardon of the Bon Dieu before you die, my son," the priest continued gently.

"Non, non—vengeance," Pierre muttered.

Gaston withdrew; he thought that, alone with the good Père, his brother's heart would soften. He went outside, and sat on the stone near the door. Gaston gone, Pierre seemed quieter. Father Gildas drew a small crucifix from his pocket, and held it before the dying man.

"The Lord Jesus died for you, my son; will you not ask Him to pardon your bad thoughts, before you go to meet Him?"

He could not let this poor, sin-stricken soul appear before its Maker without striving all in his power to win for it forgiveness.

"You are sorry now, mon ami, for your murderous, wicked thoughts. I know you are."

"Oui—*non*," Pierre broke out again. Then, closing his eyes, he turned his face to the wall.

The dews of death stood on his brow. The Curé bathed his forehead with vinegar. As the cool acid revived the dying man, he once more opened his eyes.

Again Père Gildas held the crucifix before Pierre. This time he did not refuse it. He held out one hand. The priest put it in his weak grasp, and the fingers closed upon it.

"For the Lord Jesu's sake, pardon him, and receive him, oh, merciful God!" prayed the Curé, fervently, as he knelt with uplifted hands.

Was his prayer to be answered? Had he won a soul for his Master? Was the Breton lad repentant?

The prayer of the good man *was* answered. The Lord God of Heaven had granted his petition.

Père Gildas distinctly caught the word twice, "Pardon—pardon!"

"You die in peace with all the world, my son, especially with your brother? And you hope for pardon for your own sins?"

Pierre signed assent, bowing his head. The father called in Gaston.

"He wishes to see you, Gaston; he is anxious to ask for your forgiveness. Come."

Pierre lay quite still; a softer expression on his dark, haggard face. His eyes sought his brother's; he held out his hand. Gaston took it, and pressed it fervently.

"Pardon," was the only word he spoke. It was enough for Gas-

ton, the warm-hearted Breton lad. Bending over his brother, he assured him that he forgave him everything.

A light broke over the face of the dying man. A glimmer of the light from above, thought the good priest, sent by the Saviour as a token of forgiveness to this erring sheep of His fold.

Before the moon, then rising over the trees, shone through the casement, Pierre Michel was dead. The once jealous, revengeful spirit of the Breton peasant was at rest.

"Peace be with him!" aspirated Père Gildas, as he closed the eyes of the dead man, and left the crucifix between his cold hands.

V.

WINTER had passed; the time of the singing of birds had come again. The chestnut-grove was budding forth in the joyous sunshine, making glad all hearts in this little commune.

The old stone cross, with the still, inanimate figure of the Christ, stood where it had stood for centuries: a memorial of the devout and earnest faith of generations, long since gathered to their rest.

On this joyous spring morning, Gaston Michel and Jeanne Pichon were once more standing beneath the old stone Cross. Hand in hand, they knelt on the green sward, and with hearts full of thankfulness, prayed for a blessing on the life they now hoped to live together.

They thanked the Bon Dieu—ever called so in their simple phraseology—for having heard their petitions when they were in that dreadful strait; and they vowed, by divine help, to spend the years that would be allowed them to His honour and glory.

As they rose from their knees and prepared to leave the glen, a gleam of sunshine lighted up the old stone and shone down through the chestnut shade, its rays casting a halo of glory round the bent head of the Christ.

"Do you see that, Gaston?" exclaimed Jeanne, in excitement. "It is showing us that Heaven is pleased at our having come to this blessed spot." And Gaston bowed his head in reverence.

Silently, hand in hand, the two who had just renewed the vows, made a whole long year ago, left the chestnut grove, and came out into the sunny daylight beyond; their hearts in tune with the glorious blue sky and merry warbling of the birds.

They, the two Breton lovers, were at last to receive the reward of their waiting. Darkness was gone, summer and happiness were before them: on the morrow they were to be made one.

The Bon Dieu had heard their prayer.

H. C. A.

INESTIMABLE LOANS.

THE reader, on glancing at the above title, will probably think of every "loan" except the one the writer intends him to think about. The business man will wonder if it can have reference to commercial "loans;" the straitened man who has borrowed money from his friend will at once think of his debt. But how many mothers and fathers, as they read these words will think of their children, and in their hearts agree with Carlyle, who first made the statement? Not all parents, I fear. Yet believe it as we may or may not, the fact is there: children are sent to us simply as loans from God's great storehouse, and one day He will require them again, and He will undoubtedly make us responsible for the quality of the material we render back to Him. What He lends us pure and undeveloped, He will require again as a more developed image of Himself.

You may say, on reading this, that all this is an unnecessary caution, for when God gives children, He gives the wisdom and love to guide and train them as well. Yes; but parents distort that love and wisdom, and often ruin their children with an injustice which is falsely called wisdom, or with a partiality which the idolaters fondly call love.

There are parents *and* parents; and if perchance this paper catch the eye of those belonging to the latter class, do not lightly pass it over as sentiment or nonsense, but take it to heart. God has put into your hands a responsibility before which you ought to pause and tremble.

It is needless to remind you of what you can do with a mind which has been given to you, as all God's works are given in the first place, without spot or blemish, because I have something else to dwell upon, and your own heart can tell you about that other.

In the first place my advice, nay, my entreaty, to you is—be careful how you *judge* your children. If you go into your garden, and see the tender leaves of the snowdrop peeping above the hard and frosty ground, you do not pluck them up in anger because the tiny flower has not appeared. Yet some mothers and fathers do this, metaphorically speaking, with their children. And strange to say, even after they have done this, after they have torn the leaves from its parent root, where naturally it ought to rest, they expect growth and beauty.

You, who turn to the absent, apparently stupid child, in your nursery, and openly chide it for a slowness which may only be a forerunner of thoughtfulness and grave earnestness in life and its work, are doing to your child what the illogical man would do to the leaves because the snowdrop had not yet appeared. Growths are not effected

in an instant; and remember it takes longer to rouse a lion than a lamb. As Carlyle wisely remarks: "The quickest and completest vegetable is the cabbage."

Nature is slow but sure in her developments; and the higher the development, the slower she often is. One day's sunshine opens the bud of a wild anemone; but years of sunshine and shower, of wind and calm are required for the full development of the oak. God has not put a ready-made character into your hands, but He has placed that little human life with you that you may lead it higher and higher to the light from whence it came, and whence it has to make its way back again.

For I often think we are here somewhat in the position of a child who is being taught to walk. The mother sets it on its feet, not very far away from her; though to the little one, full of unconscious dread at being abandoned even for so short a time by the loving hand, the walk seems never-ending. It has been put from its mother's arms to find its way back, and when it gets there all the misery is forgotten in the long kiss of endearment which is reward enough for its brave effort.

This, however, is a digression: a short allegory, if you will. What I wanted to show is that God has placed your child in your care in order that you may teach it to return to Him from whom it came: and this you can only do thoroughly when it is young; for in the course of nature you must one day leave it, and it must fight for itself, and in its turn lead others. If you have one child in your family, not as pretty, not as bright and not as engaging as the others, do not turn away; for as the sun shines on the dandelion as well as the lily of the valley, so ought a mother's care and love to be shed upon *all* her children, be they what they may. You never can tell. That nature, which to you appears morbid and morose, may be so formed in order to bear future crosses and privations, trials that, may be, your bright, careless, impulsive child would sink under, or, worse still, grow cynical and sceptical under.

I despise partiality where children are concerned. But if your nature is so constituted that it must be more forbearing, more loving and more devoted to one child than another, then let it be for the one who needs it the most. Not the favoured child, endowed with nature's outward gifts, but that other, who, if deprived of the precious blessing of a mother's love, will begin to think the world is loveless, and will enter into the struggles of life under this impression, and gradually —unless some softening influence of either friend or teacher step in—through the belief that there is no love in your heart towards them, will gradually lose their belief in the love of God. This may sound nonsense, but it is not, for we judge God by our earthly relationships, and by our own feelings towards those relationships. There is no surer way of making a child a sceptic than by denying it the love which ought to be a type of that Higher Love, but which

is, alas, too often but a caricature of it. Fathers and mothers, I pray you, if you have no love in your hearts towards your children, have pity!

Never judge your children from your standpoint, but from theirs. Look back upon what has passed in your life before you arrived at the conclusions you hold concerning people and things. To go back to our metaphor about the anemone and the oak—many blustering storms and mighty winds passed over the sapling ere it came to be the strong and mighty giant of trees it is: sunshine and dew have called forth the anemone, and sunshine, and dew are necessaries of its life. You are the oak, your child the anemone—give it dew in the shape of a mother's love and a father's confidence, and sunshine in the fact of letting it know and *feel* that there is *one* place in the world where it can always go for help and comfort—home.

I think it is Miss Muloch who says in one of her works that some parents think that if they give their children food and clothes it is all they need for happiness: and she goes on to say that the treatment resembles that of a man who gives his flowers everything necessary for their growth but sunshine, and wonders that they do not live.

Sunshine is a necessity in every life, but especially in the lives of children. I am no advocate for spoiling children, but I am an advocate for the bestowing of love upon them. They, who are, as it were, fresh from the hands of Him whose ruling name is Love, must be led to that divine Love through the medium of the human, as the flower, when it feels the warm rays of the sun upon its leaves, through that very warmth lifts its head and looks up to the sun from whence the heat emanates. He who was both human and divine puts mighty instruments in our poor weak hands, which we can use for good or evil, for a mighty and an awful responsibility is the great gift of influence.

Surrounded as we are, or may be, by wife or husband, children or pupils, friends or acquaintances, let us remember that they are but "loans" which have been lent by the Master, and we shall be responsible—individually responsible—for each look, word and act which has had any relation to them, and which undeniably has made them either weaker or stronger for good or evil.

E. M. O. L.

CAMPING OUT.

"IT was really very jolly of Uncle Christopher to send that tip," gratefully remarked Tom Candlish, as he looked admiringly round his small room at Oxford. A sympathising but somewhat envious friend sat on a tin box and surveyed all the new acquisitions with a sigh—for alas! *he* had no Uncle Christopher.

"Yes, yes, you are a lucky dog!"

"Why, you see," said Tom confidingly, "it happened just at the right time. I owed a little, and that's paid."

"Horribly lucky!" groaned the friend.

"And then I wanted to enjoy a good river trip, and hadn't any tin until this came. Now all these things and a new boat make everything jolly."

"Horribly jolly!" said the friend, pulling his hat over his eyes.

"I say, old chap," observed Tom, genially, as he laid down a portable bath in its neat-fitting case, "you're a cup too low! Have some champagne?"

"Why, Tom," said the other, raising his hat from his eyes, with a look of responsive geniality, "you don't mean to say your admirable relative sent you a tip and didn't saddle you with a blue ribbon?"

For answer Tom Candlish pulled forth a champagne bottle, sent the cork off in a most boisterous manner, and filled a bumper for Mr. Alfred Webbs. That young man did not make any remark before drinking, lest the fizz should subside, but when he set down his tumbler with a thankful sigh, he said:

"But, come now, Tom, what is the saddle? There must be one, or your uncle is unique."

"Well," said Tom, laughing and blushing too, "there is and there isn't. That is to say, it ought to be looked on as a greater blessing than the tip."

"What," cried Mr. Webbs eagerly, "expectations? Convertible expectations?"

"Great expectations, but not convertible," announced Tom, buckling a portmanteau with extra vigour. "The fact is I'm going to be married."

"O-o-oh!" groaned Mr. Webbs.

"Have some more champagne, Webbs. You're decidedly a cup too low." And Webbs took it, drinking silently.

"You see, Webbs, I've always been expected to marry my uncle's ward."

"And you'll do it," said Webbs, with solemnity.

"Of course," replied Tom. "But first I'm going to have my camping out—and a lovely summer it is for it!"

II.

A WEEK later found Tom Candlish gently sculling down stream, ever and anon casting glances of fond admiration on his canvas covered possessions—everything a man could wish for. He reproached himself that even the lack of a wife did not dim the horizon of his tranquil happiness.

The first available place for erecting all the patent protections against weather which he possessed caused real excitement. A charming bit of meadow, which in the evening light seemed far from any habitation.

"Delicious sense of solitude!" soliloquised the young man, as he unpacked his treasures in the gentle silence. "What a rest after the Babel of last night!"

The tent was fixed up manfully.

"Splendid! As firm as a rock!" pronounced the owner, warm and admiring.

Then there was the air-bed to inflate—Oh! *had* he forgotten the bellows? An agonized search, during which he mentally questioned if all the breath in his body would fill the flat indiarubber object lying on the turf. At last, rolled up in a flannel shirt—the bellows!

"*That's* all right," contentedly, proceeding to blow vigorously. Then, our Oxford friend objected to bathing in the river, and had brought a large portable bath, which he now took from its case and drew into position by certain necessary tyings.

"I'll fill it over night," said he, "and have nothing to do but plunge in the first thing to-morrow morning."

For this purpose he had a large tin jug which he filled many times. Having seen the inflated bed, some fine Scotch rugs, and the well filled bath all in readiness in the small apartment made by his tent, our young friend went outside it and cooked a steak in a manner which, if a cook had done it, would have been strongly objected to, but as a first personal effort was regarded as a triumph. Munched with a roll, a dash of pickle and a healthy appetite, our hero was right in saying he had supped "like a prince."

The moon rose, and with a lingering look at the romantic surroundings, Tom Candlish betook himself for the first time to his rest under canvas, vowing he could understand gypsies enjoying their freedom—as many a man has done before him.

He was very tired, and sleep needed no second beckoning. He had meant to see the sun rise, but that feat had been performed three hours before his waking. When he did wake his sensations were curious and his remarks, uttered aloud, incoherent.

"It's been raining after all, then! What a cheat that tent fellow is! Horribly wet everything is!"

Rubbing his eyes impatiently, Tom raised himself with a cramped

sensation and looked about him. He beheld his bed quite flat, and realized he had not tightly screwed the air valve. A general dampness of clothing caused him to remark that he had not successfully tied his bath into shape, the many jugfuls of water with which he had filled it having gently poured over him in the night from one of the relaxed places in the rim.

"Horrid bother, new inventions!" he growled inwardly, straightening himself, and feeling his damp flannels. "Sha'n't take a bath this morning." Indeed there was none to take, unless he braced it up and refilled it.

Warm sunshine tempted him outside, and he had just emerged when a sharp terrier's bark was followed by a lady's voice exclaiming:

"Another of those tiresome camping-out people! Too bad!" And he looked up to meet the stern reproof of an elderly maiden's eyes, and the half amused, half angry gaze of a bright blue pair, possessed by a girl of eighteen.

"I beg pardon," he said, bowing, in happy forgetfulness of his unbrushed head and general déshabille. "I thought I might camp here—saw no notice-board."

"It is never allowed," said the spinster, firmly, with a glance of intense contempt at the cooking-stove.

Poor Tom was quite distressed, but a bright young laugh cheered him.

"You look very wet! Have you tumbled in?"

"No," said Tom, colouring painfully. "It isn't the river—it's my bath!"

Upon this a fit of laughter threatened to seize the young lady, who suddenly forced herself into supernatural gravity.

"Damp clothes!" exclaimed the elder of the maidens; "terrible risk. Put some dry ones out in the sun at once, and then change. Come home, my love."

They vanished, and after that graceful figure, that laughing face, went Tom's young heart! All damp as he was, all cheerless as his wraps were, he threw himself down hopelessly on the flat air-bed.

"It's a shameful thing for a man to be sold like a slave to a woman he has never seen—as *I* am!" was his damp lament.

The necessity for action roused him; and having clad himself in some of the admirable flannels with which what he now regarded as his uncle's bribe had richly provided him, he vigorously pulled down his tent and bundled his possessions together.

"Now I'll make some coffee."

The stove was ready, so was the water, but, alas! the matches had shed their last chance of lustre in the overflow of the bath! Tom at the moment revengefully reflected on the peculiarities of an old great-aunt he possessed, who contentedly averred that one of her chief ideas of happiness in the next world lay in the hope that she should there meet and converse with Noah!

"I wish she had my luck!" he muttered, looking disconsolately round, and knowing well he was a good two miles from any inn; "she wouldn't like so much water!"

At this moment a gardener's boy passed a few yards off. "I say," called Tom, "can you give me a match?" The boy looked round carelessly.

"Ain't got none—but I'll see for one, if you like."

With that, he sauntered round to the kitchen premises, which Tom now saw were quite near, only concealed by shrubs and trees.

The cook was feeding some chickens, and the enquiry for matches for a "gent on the river," ruffled her.

"Well, to be sure! we ain't got enough work to do but must try and serve them idle fellows besides!"

Tom's need for his breakfast had made him stroll near to get his matches. He propitiated the cook with a smile which was insincere in its geniality, and a coin which was genuine.

"La! sir, wet through all night! Stop while I goes in."

The result of this go of cook's was that she reappeared with some hot coffee, and the gracious permission from her "missus," to get his wraps dried before he went on.

"Because she's a martyr to rheumatics, sir, and don't want to see anyone run a risk before their time."

Tom gratefully held the jug of hot coffee, but felt painfully placed as to where to drink it. He couldn't go to the kitchen, and therefore carried it towards his boat where cook was busy hauling out wet plaids and wraps.

The same sharp terrier's bark caused him to turn; and there in a very high breakfast cap of muslin, he beheld the elder divinity of his morning's adventure pursuing him, while in the background he could distinguish her fair companion stuffing a pocket-handkerchief into her mouth.

"Sir! Mr. —— I'm sure I don't know your name!——my servants tell me you are in great danger of taking cold, and, though it might be dangerous as a rule to admit young strangers, I hope you will come inside while we arrange about your things."

Tom Candlish bowed gratefully, and followed the lady, still carrying his jug.

"My love," said the mistress of the house, addressing the pretty girl who was in the dining-room they entered, "this gentleman will take some breakfast. Pray sit down, sir."

Accordingly Tom sat down, and rested his untasted jug of coffee, now luke-warm, on the table.

"Dear me! Let me send this away!" pursued the now attentive hostess, whose interest in Tom's good-looking face and agreeable appearance increased every minute. So the jug disappeared, a tempting breakfast took its place; a friendly butcher arrived whom the mistress must see personally, and Tom was left eating and drinking while

the bright blue eyes threw occasional shy glances at him, their owner leaning against the side of the window, pulling rose-leaves from the branches above her head. "What a picture," thought poor Tom, disconsolately; and so many another would have said.

Then back came the old lady.

"Hope you're comfortable, Mr. ——"

"Candlish," said Tom, rising, with a courteous bow.

"Ah, Candlish—yes, I know the name. Your things are drying beautifully, cook says. Quite extraordinary the interest she takes in them, my love," addressing the young girl, "for she is rather bad-tempered."

Tom smiled, thinking of the silver key to cook's affections. Then he felt it his duty to hasten his departure.

"I am really ashamed of intruding on your kindness longer, madam. If you will allow me to prepare my boat for starting."

"Well, if you wish it. They shall bring your things shortly, and we will stroll across the lawn with you."

"Here's your parasol, auntie," said the girl, at the same time placing a sailor-hat on her pretty golden head. Auntie and the parasol rested in an arbour, while the two young people stood by the flowing, sparkling river—freighted with dangerous charms in such an hour and such an opportunity!

"So your boat is called the *Flora*," said the girl, lifting her arch eyes to his.

A dull cloud and angry frown crossed Tom's face.

"Yes, but that will soon be painted out," he said, with a firm compression of his lips.

"Why?" asked the maiden, innocently.

"Because—because I'm not a humbug, and I don't like one name on my boat, and another in my heart," blurted Tom, an honest flush on his handsome face, as he looked down with rapidly-beating pulses at the fair face and form beside him.

Provokingly sweet and calm was the expression with which she said: "And pray what name is in your heart?"

"By heavens! I don't know! I wish I did!" cried poor Tom, despairingly, as he beheld cook labouring down with his wraps.

The aunt drew near, there was nothing for it but to go, and it was a hard struggle—that courteous leave taking and thanksgiving.

"So glad to have been of use! Hope you won't suffer!" said the old lady, genially, as Tom raised his straw hat and glided away on that stream which now seemed hurrying him from all he cared for, and towards all he hated.

"Oh, to be back at Oxford, with my debts, my short purse, and my freedom!" sighed the poor boy.

Tom's uncle was a rich old lawyer. He was surprised one evening, just after dinner, by a visit from his nephew.

"What, my boy, tired of holiday-making?" he asked, genially.

"No, sir, it's not that," said Tom, bracing himself for a disagreeable duty; "but I'm sorry to tell you I can't marry your ward, Flora Lennox.

Mr. Christopher Candlish seated himself, resumed his table-napkin, commenced the peeling of a juicy pear, and calmly enquired:

"Are you mad, sir?"

"Very near it," assented Tom, miserably. "You see, Uncle Christopher, it has all happened since you sent me that note—that kind cheque."

"What has happened?"

"I love another, sir—love her as my life!" cried Tom, desperately.

A look of amused relief crossed Uncle Christopher's dry countenance.

"What, since four days ago? that will soon right itself!"

"No, sir, never! I would not be such a scoundrel as to wed a girl who trusted me while my heart was another's."

"That's all very well; but you have not engaged yourself, I suppose?"

"Of course not, sir. My promise is not my own till you release me," said Tom, proudly.

"Say no more to-night," said Uncle Christopher; "take a glass of wine, go home, and come here at one o'clock to-morrow. I must, of course, consult Miss Lennox."

At one next day, Tom was ushered into the drawing-room of the dull London house. A young lady rose as he entered. Shy and blushing charms met his astonished eyes—charms he thought were blooming miles away on the banks of the Thames.

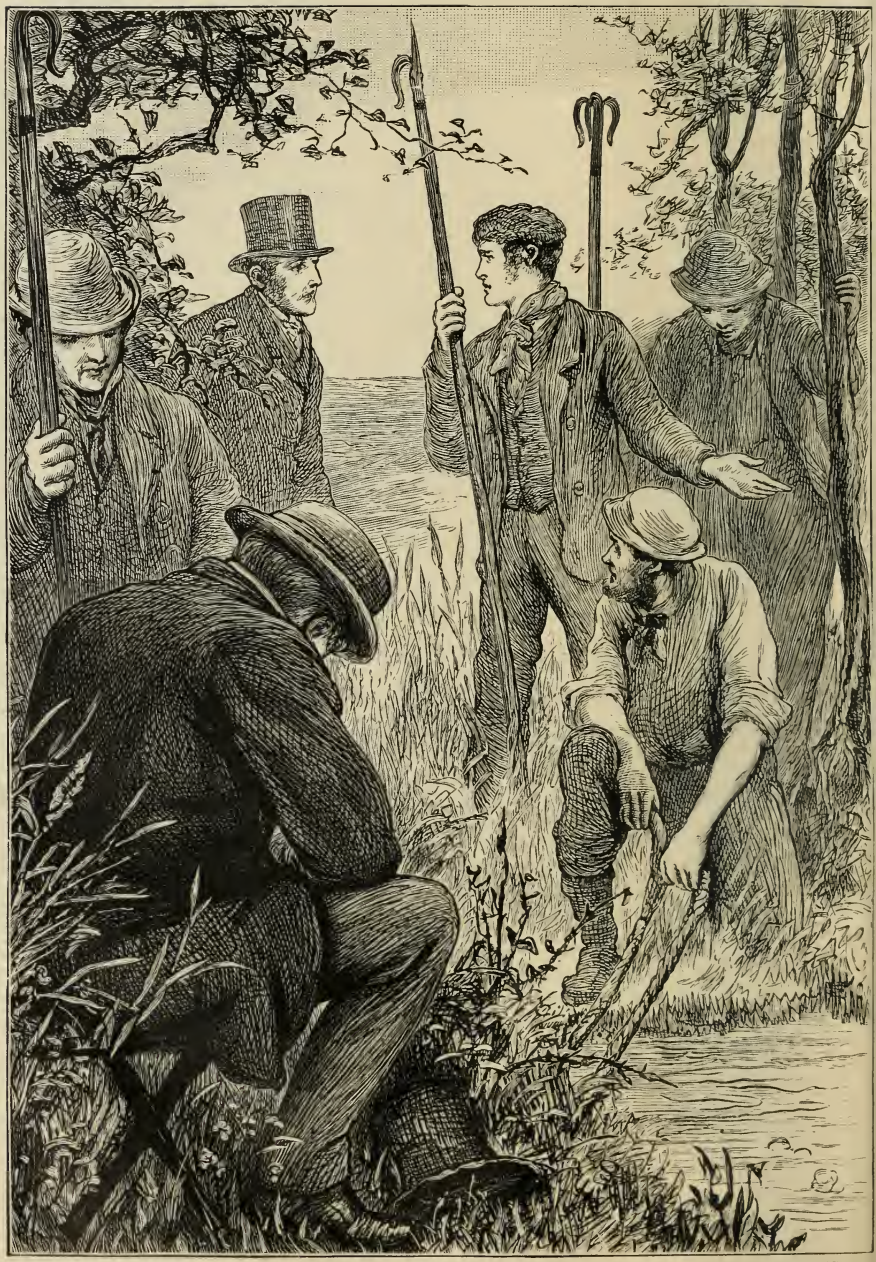
He stepped forward impetuously.

"You are ——"

"Flora Lennox," said the soft voice, regaining its merry archness. "My aunt hoped you would breakfast with her the next time you camped out on her ground—but your uncle sent for me to—to give you back your promise."

But he never took it—and the name on his boat was not painted out, for very soon a sweet wife, named Flora, steered his boat and guided his heart on the mysterious ever-changing river of life.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.



M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THE BLACK POOL GIVES UP ITS SECRET.

THE ARGOSY.

OCTOBER, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WEBSTER'S HAMMER.

DR. PALMER and his daughter Agnes were walking along in silence in the summer twilight, after the séance held at Moorland House when Miss Bessie Tempest had played "Medium."

"Papa, I don't believe a word of it," cried Agnes, her pent-up feeling at length bursting forth. "It was all a wicked cheat from beginning to end."

"Hush, child!" said the Doctor, soberly.

"The Medium, as she calls herself, is a vain, deceitful woman; just that, and nothing more," continued Agnes.

"She is a most hysterical-looking subject, I admit," returned Dr. Palmer.

"Do you believe she was unconscious, papa, when she pretended to be?" pursued the girl, with fine scorn. "I don't. Why, I saw the lead she followed in nearly every word she said!"

"Ah," said the Doctor, "while the rest of us were lost in her cleverness, you were quietly observing. Tell me what you noticed."

He had a great respect for female observation in social matters, saying that from the beginning the whole sex had been chiefly employed in watching the ways of the world, so that it must have almost developed a new sense.

"She took up what poor Mrs. Grale let drop about the Black Pool, though she chose to speak of it poetically, as 'the dark water,'" returned Agnes. "And when once she got a hint about Allan, she described his picture as it hangs in the room where we took off our bonnets. Lady Laura could have told her whose portrait it was. For that matter, Lady Laura may have coached her up beforehand."

"Lady Laura would be sure to say 'No' to that," said the Doctor, a peculiar smile upon his lips.

"Papa, I believe all that scene with poor Mrs. Grale was pure acting. Miss Tempest must have known there had been a disappearance —trouble of some sort—and she manipulated the word 'play' very carefully. There was nothing at all in the individual messages. They could be made to fit most circumstances and most people."

"There was one thing which struck me in her remarks to George Vivian," said the Doctor, thoughtfully, "and that was the way in which she dwelt upon his many happy years to come. Any sharp observer who wanted to make true prophecies would beware of doing that. I don't like George's looks—or his cough."

"Perhaps she wanted to please him, and so promised what she thought he was longing for," persisted the sceptical girl. "And the flattery she gave everybody else was positively sickening. While she was dwelling on the trials of Lady Laura, I could not help imagining a sheriff's officer smoking a long clay pipe and sipping ale in her ladyship's back hall!"

Agnes might have started had she known that her own errant imagination had hit the exact truth. That sheriff's officer sat just so till the following Monday, when Lady Laura's Sunday's letter to Mr. Grale brought an answer, with an enclosure; after which, the sheriff's officer departed.

"But there was something strange about her sudden mention of Edgar Vivian's name," said the Doctor, in a low tone of reluctance.

"When I can see an explanation for everything else, I am sure there must be an explanation for that also. It was a wicked, wicked trick, done to satisfy people's malice and suspicion, and done in a safe way, which cannot be challenged. I should have liked to make her tell what she meant, to order her 'spirits' to speak plainly or not to speak at all," continued Agnes, vehemently. "These Mediums, or whatever they call themselves, should be held responsible for what 'comes through them,' as their cant expresses it."

"My dear girl," said the Doctor, mildly, "we must be very cool and patient in the elucidation of unknown or obscure facts."

"To be sure," returned Agnes. "We must be cool and patient in chemistry and anatomy; but it is not being cool and patient to try experiments of blowing up our own houses, or plunging knives into our own friends. But, papa, what did you mean just now by saying you do not like George Vivian's looks—or his cough."

"I mean just that, Agnes. I think he looks ill, and I think that little, hacking cough of his may mean worse than it sounds to ordinary ears. George has never been strong, you know."

"You should take him in hand, papa. Ask him to let you."

"I did ask him," said the Doctor. "That is, I hinted at it."

"And what did he say?"

"Laughed at me; and said there was not anything the matter with him. I never found a young man yet who thought there was, until he grew too bad to fight against it any longer."

George Vivian having walked quickly on with Lettice, paused to say good night at the top of their little lane leading to Dr. Palmer's house. The Doctor did not invite him in. On the contrary, he bade him hasten home, for a heavy dew was threatening.

Charles Carr and Mark Acland were waiting supper for them. The young men had spent a pleasant evening together. They had wandered out into the woods and remained there long after sunset; and their faces and their minds were still fresh with the sweet breezes and the "hearty counsel" held with one another. Charles was eager for news of the party at Moorland House, and the two girls related it. The young chemist and embryo doctor were much amused.

"If the spirits could have given a hint who that man was who came to our shop, if he was not Allan Grale, it would have been some satisfaction to me," said Mark. "As for dragging the Black Pool, of course it should be done. Don't you think so, sir?"

Dr. Palmer did not answer. Charles spoke.

"Only—I suppose—if they don't find anything in it, they will be almost more uneasy now than if they do."

"But," dissented Mark Acland, "it is one thing to be uneasy over the truth, and it's another to be pestered by a fancy. Truth can always be endured."

Mark was somewhat of a philosopher in his way. And it seemed to Agnes that if she had wanted an oracle, she would far sooner have accepted the chance opinions of the two young men, bright and healthy from their woodland ramble, than the "inspirations" of hysterical Miss Bessie Tempest, with her flabby furbelows, and her faint perfumes. And yet, for all Agnes Palmer's scepticism and contempt, the words spoken by Bessie Tempest haunted her and kept her wakeful half through the night.

The next day was Sunday, a sweet summer Sunday. In those lovely Dering lanes, with the sunbeams glancing through the over-arching trees, and the cleanly cheerful groups of villagers wending their way from snug mossed cottages to the white church gleaming on the green hill-side, it seemed hard to believe in the existence of sin and suffering, deception and crookedness. There was strength in the sweet solemnity of the worship, there was soothing in the simple melody of the hymn. Agnes, like all people of healthy nature, yielded herself to healthy influences the moment they touched her; and the pain in her spirit settled into a mere blank, a want of something which ought to have been there—an emptiness like that of the Court pew in Dering Church, for not one of the Vivians appeared at Divine service to-day.

On Monday morning Mark Acland was to return to Sladford. He had made arrangements with his master, the doctor, not to be expected before noon. This would give him time to walk over to Carstow, after breakfast at Dr. Palmer's. Charles was to accompany him so far, that they might both see Charles's new invention safely off by the

main line train which was to take it to a manufacturer in the midland counties; who, through Mr. Grale's intervention, had consented to give it practical trial.

As the two young men entered the parlour, Lettice, already busy at the breakfast table, looked up to speak.

"The post is in, Charles, and the scanty correspondence is all for you." Many people in Dering, including Dr. Palmer, did not have their letters delivered on a Sunday morning.

"I expect you will have a note from Webster, acknowledging the receipt of the hammer and graciously pardoning your ungracious delay," observed Mark, laughingly, as he took his seat.

There were only two missives—a letter, and a yellow railway notice. The first did not look particularly interesting, whereas there is always some excitement about a possible parcel, so Charlie opened the circular first. Of course it gave no particulars, except that a prepaid parcel was awaiting him at Dering Station. Briefly announcing this, and leaving Lettice and Agnes to exclaim and conjecture, he turned to his letter.

"Webster's hand-writing," commented Mark, looking at the envelope the other threw aside.

"Well, to be sure!" exclaimed Charles. "Is there to be no end of bewitchment about this implement? The parcel now waiting for me at the station contains the very hammer I sent to Webster last week. He returns it, because he says his own was duly sent to him last autumn! It was sent to his old address at Sladford, and was forwarded to him thence."

"Who sent it?" cried Mark.

"He adds," said Charles, reading on, "'It had been sent to Sladford by the post, at which I wondered, as its weight made the postage heavy, and there was no note either enclosed or accompanying it, which I also thought strange. Probably you will understand how the mistake was made, and I am sorry that you should have had the trouble of buying and sending a new one.'"

"Now, what can we make out of that, sir?" asked Charles, addressing the Doctor, who had entered the room while he was reading the letter.

The Doctor sat down. "You absolutely cannot recall when you last saw the hammer?" he enquired. "But I remember you have already said you cannot. Who knew that you had borrowed the hammer?"

"Oh, several people knew that. The clerks in the counting-house at the Works knew it; and Allan Grale knew it; and—and Edgar Vivian also," concluded Charles, with reluctant hesitation.

"Well," broke in Agnes, almost passionately. "Why do you shrink from saying that Edgar Vivian knew? What could be more natural?'

Her father put his hand gently on her shoulder. She drew herself

away, but not fractiously. Each must bear his own burden, and there is some sympathy which can scarcely exist except as pity, and so is painful.

"I beg your pardon, papa," she said, quite humbly.

"Edgar Vivian knew of it in this way," said Charles. "He walked in from Carstow station with me the day that I first got the hammer. I showed it to him, and told him it was lent to me through Mark Acland."

"'Webster, Sladford,' was printed on the handle," observed Mark. "You say you took that for the maker's name," he added, looking at Charles. "But Mr. Edgar Vivian would probably know Webster's shop: he was often at Sladford for the cricket-matches."

"Well, I don't see that we can make anything out of the matter," said Dr. Palmer. "But I suppose, under all the circumstances, we had better let Mr. Grale know about this."

"And then Mr. Webster can send up his hammer to let Miss Bessie Tempest impart guesses about it, and thereby cover herself with honour and glory," cried Agnes, speaking bitterly.

Half an hour later, as Mark Acland was on his way to the station, Charles accompanying him, they met a cart, containing some men, strangers to Dering, and a quantity of curious gear. One of the men touched his hat to Mark.

"Why, they must have come in from Sladford!" he exclaimed. "They are the lock-keeper and some watermen belonging to Sladford canal."

Leaving Charles on the footpath, Mark went up to the cart and spoke with the lock-keeper. The young fellow's face looked grave as he returned to his friend.

"Mr. Grale lost no time," he remarked. "He despatched a special messenger to Sladford on Saturday night."

"But what for?—what are the men going to do?" asked Charles Carr.

"They are come to Dering to drag the Black Pool."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE BLACK POOL GIVES UP ITS SECRET.

Before that day was out, Dr. Palmer was fetched to the Court in hot haste, to attend a new patient there.

It was George Vivian himself.

Years before George had had a serious lung attack, of the kind which, by its suddenness and the unmistakable gravity of its manifestations, sometimes alarms the patient into a valetudinarian existence, and generally conveys a warning so solemn as to command more or less attention. George for some time had been more or less under the

hands of the medical men, of Dr. Palmer in particular; he had been debarred from many pleasures that other youths and young men enjoy; of balls, and severe gymnastics, and public speaking; but he had his consolations in frequent change of air and scene, and a life of elegant leisure. And as the years went on, he had become so apparently strong, that perhaps nobody remembered the old fears, except Dr. Palmer, or that the past grave attack might sometime be renewed.

But the attack had come. It had come quite suddenly, when nobody was looking for it, least of all George himself, and the Doctor was summoned to Dering Court in haste. And George, as well as Dr. Palmer, knew that what, happening once might be but an accident, happening twice meant the shadow of the end.

Maria was in devoted attendance on her brother, and Dr. Palmer was not sorry to think that her confinement in his sick room might for the present spare her all knowledge of what was going on at the Black Pool. He also hoped another thing: that the cold words, the surmises and suspicions being whispered abroad of Edgar Vivian, would not reach her ears abruptly.

How far had such suspicion and surmise any foundation? And would this horrible quest be fruitless? Dr. Palmer could not silence these inner questions.

In the evening, when he was on his way to pay a second visit to the Court, he turned out of his road to go and take a look at the watermen at their work.

The work of dragging the Black Pool, deep in bottom and densely weedy at its sides, might not be effectually completed in less than two or three days. But the watermen's first hours of toil had not gone quite unrewarded. Mr. Grale, grimly watching their labours, had turned half angrily from the old tin vessels and faded rags which they had brought up for his gaze. But just before Dr. Palmer had arrived on the scene, they had secured a very different prize. It did not look unlike the other useless débris which had no significance whatever. It was only a man's hat; and the watery bed it had had for months made its appearance exactly as if it had been the discarded head-gear of some tramp or gipsy. The watermen judged it to be such, as they lifted it up, and shook off the heavy moist weeds which enveloped it. Mr. Grale, anxiously watching from the opposite bank, thought little else. But when he saw the men turn it round and look inside it, and look again, and then look at each other, he felt that they had come upon something at last, and he went forward eagerly to meet them as they carried it towards him.

There was no mistake about it. Sorely stained and soiled as it was, on the white silk lining of the hat there remained distinctly visible the name of "Allan Grale."

The rough watermen stood awkwardly round the stern old father. Whatever emotion might stir him inwardly gave no outward sign, unless indeed it lay in the absolute silence in which he, after a moment, waved

them back to their work. Even when Dr. Palmer came up, he said nothing; he only pointed to the hat; and when the Doctor saw it he realized by the revulsion of disappointment, how strongly he himself had hoped and believed that the Black Pool had no secret to surrender.

The Doctor could not bear to see his old neighbour sitting there, in that terrible silence, watching the troubled waters which could not hold their own much longer. He would have liked to bid him go home and entrust the awful surveillance to some one else. But he knew Mr. Grale was not a man to brook any such interference. So he went round the margin of the Pool to have a little conversation with the men. He knew the Sladford lock-keeper, and meant to suggest to him that they should suspend their labours for that evening, for Mr. Grale's sake.

The men paused as he approached. They had a reason of their own for so doing, apart from civility.

"This is terrible work, Jenkins," said the Doctor to the lock-keeper.

"Aye, sir," responded Jenkins, wiping his brow. "And I am glad you are come up, sir. That there old gentleman should not be allowed to stay here."

"Who can make him go?" returned Dr. Palmer.

Jenkins shook his head. "I reckon we've got hold of something just this minute, Dr. Palmer, sir," he said, in a whisper. "It may not be got to the surface for a good while, or it may come almost directly. Being medical, you don't need to be told, sir, that things which have lain long in the water are an awful sight."

Dr. Palmer nodded. But what could he do? "Can you not say, Jenkins, that you are going to leave off in a few minutes,——and then I may get him to walk to the high road with me. Perhaps you really are?"

"Aye, sir," said Jenkins, "it may be in no time. For if it does not come up easy like, we shall leave it till to-morrow."

Nothing but the inducement given, that the men "were just going to take up their grappling irons and leave off," could have persuaded Mr. Grale to quit his post. Dr. Palmer linked his arm within his, and led him away. He had tied that battered hat in his bandana handkerchief, and carried it in his hand, as in his hard-working and penniless boyhood he had perhaps carried his little all.

"Mrs. Grale must not see that," said the Doctor.

"I'll leave it at the lodge," he replied. "Poor Polly! Perhaps it's only right I should go home to her." Yet he paused on the edge of the high road, and looked back. "I ought to return later," he said, "and make sure that all is quiet."

"I'll do that on my way home from the Court," answered the Doctor, hastily. "And then I'll look in upon you at Moorland House."

So they parted. But Dr. Palmer turned and turned again to see that Mr. Grale had not again changed his mind. No, the manufacturer with his ominous burden went steadily forward. How bent and old he looked! How he had changed in the last day or two! In the distance he might have been taken for an aged labourer returning from a day's toil. And, perhaps there was not one such in all England with a heart so heavy as his.

The Doctor hurried to the Court, where he made his visit as short as possible. George Vivian was no worse; he was decidedly as well as could be expected, and felt no alarm. Nay, the most troublesome symptom about him was his anxiety for a speedy recovery. Though forbidden to speak in any tone above a whisper, he had distressed Maria by telling her that he must make arrangements for getting mountain air as soon as possible—nothing would do him good like mountain air. Maria, in agony, had besought him to remember that much movement or exertion was absolutely forbidden him. He had only smiled; and to her dismay, had persisted in writing a letter; which he charged her to see was put into the post-bag.

"It was directed to Mrs. McOrist, at Ragan, Ross-shire," said Maria, dropping a few tears as she disclosed this to Dr. Palmer. "That was the farm to which George took so great a fancy when he and Allan Grale visited it last Autumn. He has made up his mind that a long stay there would quite set him up. But it must be much colder there than here—and what a frightfully long journey it would be for one in his condition!"

"Well, he cannot go yet," observed Dr. Palmer. "We may safely leave it an open question, for the present. If he does go, later, you would have to accompany him. You need change and mountain air almost as much as he does."

"I don't know what my poor Uncle would do without us," sighed Maria. "The Court seems under a dreadful cloud just now!" she added, raising her pathetic eyes to the Doctor's. He almost started. How true her last words were! Yet he felt she spoke them without any special meaning. How long would she remain in blessed ignorance of the dark doubts whispered about Edgar?"

"There, there," he said kindly, "I must not keep you longer out of your brother's room, or he may be attempting to arrange his chairs and tables by way of wholesome exercise. Don't you oppose his whims and fancies when laying out his plans for the future, Miss Vivian: rather appear to fall in with them."

Dr. Palmer hastened back to the Black Pool. It was not twilight yet, but the sunshine was out of the atmosphere, leaving it cool and gray. Not a voice fell on the Doctor's ear as he approached the Pool. Had the men really left their task, disappointed in their latest find, or unable to secure it until the morrow. He hurried on.

No. They were still at their task. But they were no longer at work. They were gathered around something which lay on the

grass at their feet. It was a terrible something in the guise of a man. When they saw Dr. Palmer coming they stood a little apart, but nobody uttered a word until he spoke.

"Thank heaven that we got Mr. Grale away!"

"Mr. Grale, though he is his father, couldn't have known him—or anybody else, either," spoke the lock-keeper, hoarsely. "But I expect there'll be marks, or linen, or something for identification."

"Ah, there can be little doubt," sighed Dr. Palmer. "Why, there's the light over-coat which he had with him: we all knew that coat well. It's strange; it's very strange."

Dr. Palmer was thinking of his own story about the man on the Carstow Road; the one he had seen that night from his patient's window, and whom he had certainly taken for Allan Grale. He must have been mistaken, after all. "This is the way that ghost tales grow," he thought, with the half-conscious habit of a mind trained to trace cause into effect.

"Can you tell me, sir, what we are to do with it?" asked the lock-keeper. "We have our litter for the removal; but where is it to be taken to?"

At first Dr. Palmer could not answer the question. It would never do to take it to Moorland House.

"The smith has a lock-fast out-building behind his smithy," he said after reflection. "I am sure he will not refuse it to us. His place is quite near. I will go on and speak to him; and afterwards do my best in breaking the news to Mr. Grale."

The little procession was soon formed. The watermen had their hand-litter and their tarpaulins, and carried the poor human salvage with a homely reverence. The smith and his wife were instantly at Dr. Palmer's service. The good woman hurried into the outhouse with her sheets and pillows, thinking to make decent preparation for the dead. But the Doctor sent her away; the sight was too dreadful for any unnecessary eyes. He and its bearers disposed it as creditably as possible—even thankful that the light was waning dim!

"Did he drown hisself, I wonder," said the smith in an awe-struck whisper.

"I think the skull is stove in," observed the lock-keeper. "But that might have happened after death, you know."

"These will be questions for the post-mortem," interposed Dr. Palmer.

"Begging your pardon, sir," said the experienced lock-keeper, "but before you go to Mr. Grale, had you not better look at the linen marks, and into the pockets? Relations are often suspicious, and there's many a dead man who has shaken a living man's character."

Dr. Palmer took the hint, but his inquisition was brief and rapid. There were two or three shillings and some copper money in one of the pockets, a lead pencil, a sheet of a sporting newspaper, and a handkerchief marked in ink "A. G."

"That will suffice," he said. "Any further examination will do afterwards."

They drew a white sheet gently over the awful thing. And they hung another to screen the dusky window of the outhouse. And then they all came out, and the Doctor made fast the door and took away the key in his own pocket.

And in less than an hour there was wild weeping in Moorland House, and a messenger was speeding across the country to apprise the coroner of the need for his services; while the Dering villagers ran in and out of each other's cottages and made public property of any confidences which might have been privately exchanged during the last few weeks.

Only Mr. Grale sat, pale and silent. He had not been sorry when he first thought that Allan had gone away. But Allan could never come back now.

The father shed not a tear. He had not a word: except once.

Mrs. Grale cried out that she and her sister Marget were two miserable women. "Those live who would be better dead," she wailed. "And those die who should live!"

"Poor Polly!" said her husband. That was all. But there was something in the tone which touched some recollection in the mother's mind. She was not comforted: she was not soothed: she was not called from her grief to console his. But her moans grew more gentle.

The coroner's inquest was held in the village school-house, where the rooms were large and suitably furnished with benches. The children were enjoying a week's holiday, which left the place at liberty.

As to the identification of the remains, the jurymen themselves had known Allan Grale, and they testified to their recognition of him. They could see all that could be seen—that the dead man was of Allan's height and build—that he had the familiar light-brown curly hair; and of the hand which had not been clenched in the death agony, the little finger had a slight crook, a little congenital peculiarity which Allan had inherited from his mother. But more special evidence was forthcoming.

The father's came first. He said he believed the body was that of his son Allan. He had not seen him since October last. Had not been alarmed at his disappearance at first, believing he had wished to absent himself from home for a short time. Had afterwards heard reports of his being in Scotland, and had grown very angry about the matter. Latterly he had grown to feel alarmed at the prolonged absence, and at the total lack of any news.

One of the maids from Moorland House—Susan—was next called to testify to certain points. She identified (as others had already done) the light overcoat, which Mr. Allan had taken with him the

evening he left; and she could swear to a miniature dressing-case found in one of the pockets of the coat. She could not speak so positively as to the ordinary tweed suit which was shown her, but she knew Mr. Allan had had two or more suits of similar appearance. She could not identify the handkerchief, despite its initials, neither the under-clothing. She said with some hesitancy that these were not so fine as Mr. Allan's, nor could she remember that he had had any mended as they were. She was in the habit of looking through the Moorland House linen as it went to and came from the laundry. She had often found articles which she did not recognise as Mr. Allan's, but which she found afterwards he had bought on emergencies during his travels, or else had been changed at hotels for his own in the washing.

Susan went on, in answer to questions, to say that she was one of the last people who had seen her young master. He had left home on the twentieth of last October. That same afternoon, Mr. Edgar Vivian had called; but on being told (by herself) that Mr. Allan was gone out, he had written a note in pencil in the hall, which she had carried up to Mr. Allan's room, and placed on his table. When Mr. Allan came home to dinner that evening, he went up to his room and no doubt saw the note. It was after dinner, soon after it, that he finally left. Mr. Allan had dined alone that evening, the rest of the family not being at home. Further, the witness said that Mr. Allan Grale generally wore his watch—always, indeed, so far as she knew. Also his signet ring. But the signet ring had been found on his dressing-table. Possibly he had omitted to replace it on his finger after washing his hands for dinner.

No watch had been found on the body: hence these questions to Susan.

Mr. Edgar Vivian was next called. He came forward looking very pale and with a constrainedly calm manner.

He remembered calling at Moorland House. The servant just examined told him Mr. Allan Grale was out: she thought he had gone to Dr. Palmer's, to take something to Charles Carr. He saw the carriage driving away with the ladies in it as he came in sight of the house. He wrote a short note in pencil to young Mr. Grale, asking him to meet him on the morrow at the Black Pool. He could not say whether he had dated the note. Probably not.

These words were listened to amid breathless silence. Edgar Vivian spoke them in a low, clear voice.

He went on to say that he had not received any answer to his note. But he had gone to the Black Pool the next day. Allan Grale did not appear, did not keep the appointment. He had wished for a conversation with him on business. The business was of a private nature. Two or three days afterwards, he received a letter which he had believed came from Allan. It requested that a small box, which Allan had put in his charge, should be sent to Scotland, to a certain

address, given. He complied with the request at once and sent off the box.

Upon being asked by the coroner whether he could produce that letter, the witness replied that he was very sorry to say he could not. The letter had in some way disappeared; he believed that he must, himself, have torn it up by mistake.

That was all. The coroner, in curt words and tone, told the witness he might go. And as Edgar Vivian turned and faced the little assembly, he believed he knew how Cain had felt when he met the first eyes which saw the mysterious brand of murder on his brow.

The next person called was the yellow woman, Jane West, very much to the surprise of the assemblage. She came forward, trim and self-possessed, and attired in deep and handsome mourning. The yellow cloak was folded across her arm: she had put it off to appear before the coroner.

After all, she had not any evidence to give that was of much account, only that on the twentieth day of last October, in the evening, she had met Mr. Allan Grale, whom she knew well by sight, near the Black Pool. He appeared to be walking to it. She had noticed him particularly. She thought at the time that he looked a little different from what he usually did look, and remarked to herself that it was because he was wearing a light great-coat, which she herself had not before seen him in. Yes, it was similar to that coat, now produced Could be quite certain of the date—the twentieth of October.

Two or three more unimportant witnesses were examined, and then came the medical testimony; that of Dr. Palmer and Mr. Holmes of Sladford. They said that the body had been in the water for some months, which prevented a very particular examination; but they testified that there was an injury to the head, sufficient to have caused death, inflicted by some small, heavy instrument. It must have been a rather peculiar instrument, Mr. Holmes said; and he could imagine no possibility of such an injury having been received after the immersion of the body. It could not have been self inflicted.

The audience listened breathlessly; despite sundry sinister rumours, the opinion of many had constantly reverted to suicide.

In answer to further inquiries, the Doctor said that after such a lapse of time it was almost impossible to speak positively on any point, but appearances did not indicate death by drowning.

Thus it appeared, if the opinion of the two medical men was correct—and there could be no reason to doubt it—that poor Allan Grale had neither destroyed himself nor died by drowning. His life had been taken from him by the violent hand of some adversary.

And in the heart of nearly everybody present, there arose one name—that of Edgar Vivian.

The coroner summed up, and the jury retired to the infant school-room to consider their verdict—where chromos of elephants and lambs on the walls looked down upon them as they debated. Nothing but

an open verdict could be returned. Suspicion might lie more or less on Edgar Vivian, but there was no evidence, as yet, brought forward against him. They carried in the following verdict:

"We find that the deceased is Allan Grale; and that he met his death by violence at the hands of some person or persons unknown."

"That will do, gentlemen," said the coroner, briskly. "If any more evidence should turn up, as perhaps it may, further proceedings can then be taken."

The court broke up, and the audience poured out of the close room into the summer sunshine. Mr. Grale hurried off to Moorland House, accompanied by a strange gentleman who had been present and was understood to be his lawyer, and by Dr. Palmer.

But one curious incident came out at the inquest, which has not been yet told.

In the right-hand trouser pocket of the dead man, amidst the two or three shillings lying there, was found the spade guinea lost by General Vivian. This was an extraordinary thing, quite unexplainable.

Had the guinea fallen accidentally from the General's watch chain on the road, and had Allan Grale picked it up? If so, why did he not restore it to the family? Had he forgotten to do so, and been murdered before he remembered it?

"I never thought it was so bad as this," cried the poor stricken-down father as he entered his house with the lawyer and Dr. Palmer, and they shut themselves into a room together. "What has he done, my poor boy, that he should be barbarously murdered?"

It was a question that could not be answered.

Another question, lying in abeyance and doubt, was with what instrument had the fatal injury been inflicted? A little conversation had taken place upon this point in the inquest room; and it was now especially exercising the mind of Dr. Palmer.

He was asking himself whether it could have been the watchmaker's hammer.

The probability was, he thought, that the small parcel which Allan had carried out with him on that afternoon, intending to take it to Charles Carr, must have contained that mysterious hammer. Had the unfortunate young man had it still in his possession in the evening, and had it been used against him? He mentioned this to Mr. Grale.

The lawyer said something about further investigation into the crime, and a trial, but he was interrupted by Mr. Grale.

"I don't want a trial," cried the fierce old man, with flashing eyes. "Let the man escape. But let him understand that we know he is a murderer. That can be done in a thousand ways against which he will not dare to contend."

"I think the people to-day made him conscious of their feeling on the matter," observed the lawyer, who had completely adopted the

suspicion against Edgar Vivian. "Probably he will soon feel himself driven out of the neighbourhood."

"Into exile," snarled Mr. Grale. "Well, that will do. To my mind, there's more satisfaction in that than there is in capital punishment. Let his conscience be his punishment."

A day or two later, and then the poor dead body, which the miserable mother was not allowed to see, was duly deposited in the Dering graveyard, in the very centre of the little plateau which was railed off as "the Grale ground." And the Lady Laura Bond, who had asked leave to attend the funeral, "to support her dear friend, Mrs. Grale," brought masses of flowers to heap upon the coffin. She also brought Viscount Rockford and Lord Pelerin.

"Mary Anne Grale will be enormously rich now; there's only herself left to inherit," she had remarked to these two choice young men.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MORNA'S MARRIAGE.

"I KNEW it! I knew it! You know I knew it all the time!" had been Maria Vivian's first and only exclamation when she was told that the body of her old lover had been drawn from the dark waters of the Black Pool. She had accepted all the anguish, whatever it was, long ago, and the final discovery seemed to make it no more real to her than it had been before. She listened even to the conjectures and suggestions concerning its manner with a strange, benumbed absent-mindedness. It seemed as if she had her own convictions concerning that, too, and that they were of a kind not to be easily disturbed by aught which might appear to contradict them.

But Maria was entirely unacquainted with the suspicions cast on her brother Edgar.

Dering Court was certainly a very sad place in those days. With all George Vivian's feverish anxiety for recovery—perhaps because of it—he did not make real progress. If one day he felt well enough to take a few gentle turns on the terrace, the next day found him obliged to own that he was too weak to lift a foot.

Still George's mind dwelt constantly on a journey to the far North. A day never passed without his descanting on the beauties of such a life as he might enjoy for months on the farm at Ragan. He must be able to start off there soon, so as to lay in a stock of strength and vitality during the remaining months of summer and autumn. And really, he said, if he derived the benefit of which he felt certain, he thought he would be wise to remain there through the winter. Many medical men held that a severe yet dry and bright climate was beneficial to such a case as his. Dering winters were inclined to be so damp and dull. The snows at Ragan would suit him far better.

"But think of the comforts that you can have in such a home as this!" urged Maria, the tears starting to her eyes with pain at his restless longing to be elsewhere.

"Comforts!" echoed George. "You have little idea of the comfort of a house built as houses are where cold weather lasts long. Ragan is of stone; its walls are twice as thick as these. Peat smoulders on the hearths day and night, and there is health and healing in its very savour. I am not an invalid, to need reclining chairs and so forth," added George, ignoring the fact that he lay helplessly among his sofa cushions as he spoke.

"Oh, George!"

"Well, I shan't be when I'm a bit stronger—and that will be soon."

Maria yielded the point. Alas, she was only too much afraid that the Fates were on her side, and that all the projects could never get beyond wishes!

"But would the family be able to accommodate us both for so long a time?" she enquired. "These good people may cramp themselves to receive strangers during the summer months, but they like to have their homes in peace for the winter."

"Why!" exclaimed George, "I should never think of taking you there. The life would not suit you at all, Maria."

"How do you know that?"

"You would want your poor people and your books. You could not amuse yourself for weeks with a sketch block, as I can. What will be repose for me, would be an unbearable tedium for you."

"I can enjoy any sort of quiet life, I think, George," answered Maria. "How could we bear to have you so far away from us here, and alone? Who would nurse ——"

"I don't want care or nursing," interrupted George, pettishly. "That is just what I shall not want, once I am there. A man never gets out of his invalidism till he gets rid of his nurses."

Maria turned away her head with a sigh. "I know how tiresome it must be to you, George, to have to be guarded and watched ——"

Again he interrupted her fretfully. He seldom got through a conversation about that longed-for journey to Ragan without relapsing into a state of nervous irritation which Maria feared originated in his consciousness of how very remote its chances were. She could not imagine why he should so desire it—unless a craze had seized upon him, as it sometimes does on invalids.

George sometimes received letters bearing the Ragan postmark. Once Maria, noticing the good, manly handwriting of the address, enquired of her brother who his correspondent was, and he replied "Colin Vass." Maria had already heard George talk of him. Indeed, when he first returned from Scotland after the visit to it with Allan Grale, he had talked much and openly of the McOrist family.

Latterly he had grown more reticent. But to-day he seemed to be

in a communicative humour. He told Maria that he was quite expected at Ragan, that everybody there was ready to receive him; and he went on to speak of sundry changes which had taken place upon the farm.

"Only fancy, Maria," he said: "the daughter of the house, Morna McOrist, is actually married. That last news was a surprise to me. She was one of those girls whom one does not altogether expect will marry.

"But was she not pretty," returned Maria, who felt sure she had heard so.

"Ah, was she not!" said George, with enthusiasm. "She was beautiful. But, to me, she seemed more like a spirit than a girl. I have found it hard to think of her in any of the ordinary ways of life; and yet, after all, this marriage of hers seems to have been quite a commonplace affair."

"Is she well-educated and lady-like?" enquired Maria.

"Are spirits—angels—well-educated and lady-like?" retorted George, with something very like scorn. "The question sounds hardly queerer in that connection than in connection with Morna McOrist. You are terribly limited, Maria. You have lived so much among china teacups, and set flower-beds, that you must have your doubts of mountain springs, and moorland gorse and heather."

Maria would not allow herself to think that he spoke unkindly. But she did think of the pain it would be if words like these should recur to her memory, when George was no longer there to speak otherwise.

He went on. "It is hard to realise that Morna McOrist is changed into Mrs. Smith ——"

"Is she?" interrupted Maria. "Mrs. Smith!"

"Mrs. Smith; just that. So they tell me. It seems the old father and mother were not altogether satisfied with the marriage. But I doubt if any marriage would have satisfied them for Morna. However, she had her own way, as I suspect she generally could have with them. I wonder how the cousin, Colin Vass, likes it!"

"Do you think he would particularly dislike it?" asked Maria, in a meaning tone.

George laughed. "Well, I have an idea of the sort, though I believe that personally he regarded Morna as he might a tutelary angel, or an exalted fairy. For the rest of it, the young man has lived awhile outside his native glen; he has been to College, and has enlightened, modern ideas, and so is far less likely than the old people to be prejudiced against a stranger, because he is a stranger. I need scarcely say, Maria, that this Mr. Smith is one, since I daresay you perceive it is not an old Highland name!"

Maria smiled dimly, thankful for any sparkle of George's former playfulness. "Did he go there a stranger?" she asked.

"I infer so," replied George. "And I fancy he must have been up

there for some months. What he is, or who he is, I know not. One thing I expect would plead strongly in his favour,—that he is not going to take Morna away from the Glen. The father and mother would hardly have survived that."

"Has he taken a house there?"

"Of all the snug, common-place arrangements," went on George, still laughing, "which one could never have imagined in connection with such a girl, this last is the chief! Mr. and Mrs. Smith have taken the management, or are to take it, of the local hotel! It is only about one mile from Ragan itself."

"Well," said Maria. It seemed to her a very natural and commendable state of things for a small farmer's daughter and a respectable young man from the South. "Then Mr. Smith cannot be a gentleman," said Maria, quickly.

"No; unless he is a reduced one. Fellows do all kinds of things when the pocket fails. It is impossible to picture a girl of the refined nature of Morna McOrist 'taking up,' as our servants say, with any man not a gentleman."

"After all, George, she is only a farmer's daughter."

"True. But—well you cannot understand what an incongruity it would be unless you knew her. This Mr. Smith had been staying at the hotel for some time when the landlord was laid prostrate by a sudden and severe illness, likely to be protracted if not permanent. The young Englishman, as Colin tells me, undertook, entirely out of good feeling and kindliness, the management of the house; and Morna, out of the same good feeling, came up from Ragan to assist the landlady with her duties, so as to set her partly free to nurse her sick husband. A few weeks of such close acquaintance stands as good as months of slighter intimacy, you know: and that's how the affair sprung up between Morna and Mr. Smith."

"Does Colin say what part of England Mr. Smith comes from—or what his position has been?" questioned Maria.

"Not a word. Apparently Mr. Smith does not say it himself. They call him 'reserved.' Possibly he may have had his dark and foolish days of some sort, or he may have suffered through others. I can quite understand Morna's love going forth most strongly to anybody who needed an almost celestial pity and help. They say he seems devoted to her: but that nevertheless all the joy of the union seems on her side."

"Does Colin Vass write all this to you, George?"

"He, or some of the others."

It passed through Maria's mind that these Ragan people must be surely very good correspondents for elderly Scotch folk of even the most superior farming class. And how singular it was that they should write so freely to a comparative stranger, as George must be, of the affairs of their own daughter.

"Is it the mother who writes all these particulars to you?" she asked.

"Oh, no," replied George. A slight constraint seemed to settle on him as he added: "Somebody I know is staying in—in the neighbourhood; that's how I get my chief news."

Maria looked up with a vivid interest now. Her face asked the question she did not utter, and George replied to her glance.

"Nobody you know, Maria. It is somebody with whom I made acquaintance at Redbourne."

"Oh," said Maria. "Is he an artist?"

"An artist, yes," replied George, briefly.

"What is his name?" asked Maria, innocently.

"They are called Forester," said George.

"They!" echoed Maria. "Are there two? Is it a brother and sister?"

"It is a man and wife," answered George.

"Forester?—Forester? I seem to have heard that name before," remarked Maria; but unable at the moment to recall how and where she had heard it. "Are they an old married couple, George? Have they any children?"

"No. An infant was born to Mrs. Forester prematurely: too prematurely to live. And now, Maria, I think I must rest a bit; I am tired," said George, turning his face away from her to bury it in the sofa pillow.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"CAIN."

So life at Dering Court settled down for days and weeks under conditions which would have once seemed to Maria Vivian unendurable; but which, like much which seems so prospectively, she now endured very patiently, little hopeful of any change for the better.

The relations between the family at Moorland House and Lady Laura Bond had grown very intimate indeed. Her ladyship was constantly paying visits to Mrs. Grale, listening with so much patience and sympathy to her garrulous narratives about her own young life and her "sister Marget," that the bereaved woman did not restrain the last drop of bitterness in her lamentation over poor Alny's sad end, but candidly bewailed that, after all her housewifely care and motherly pride, her boy had been done to death in a patched shirt, and carrying a common sixpenny handkerchief!

"One ought not to have an unkind thought of the dead," she sobbed, "least of all, of those that are taken as he was; but it does seem hard that he had not more regard for the pains and trouble I always took—and there's two dozen beautiful shirts left to waste now, and I could not count the handkerchiefs!"

"Very sad!" murmured Lady Laura, softly wiping her eyes.

"Oh, it is! But if you'll believe it, Lady Laura," went on the poor mother, "I daren't speak out these feelings of mine to Mary Anne. She likes everything nice, I can tell you, but she has always had it found ready to her hand without taking thought or trouble for it herself. And a proper pride and interest in these things seems sordid to her."

"Mary Anne is young. And the young cannot be expected to feel as we do, my dear lady."

Mrs. Grale sighed. She had confided everything—nearly everything—and how different that is!—to Lady Laura. She told her it was she who had discovered that a box had been sent to Corrabuin, directed to Allan, after he had disappeared. She confided, with many tears, how she had been too easily satisfied concerning his safety by the removal of that box, little dreaming that it had returned to his father's hands. She did not tell Lady Laura what was in that box—indeed she could not do so—but she did not tell her that she did not know; that even since the inquest she had asked her husband once, in vain, and had reasons of her own for not repeating the question. No, all of that she kept secret, speaking of that box as if its interest lay only in Edgar Vivian's anxiety to get it off his own hands. Concerning Edgar, Mrs. Grale gave no uncertain sound. He had killed her Alny; of course he had: man might never be able to prove and punish the treacherous deed, but it would be proved and punished, for all that. Nobody should hinder her from having her say. What mattered now? Her boy was killed among them, and they might take away all her money, or put her in prison if they liked for saying so.

Cautioned as much by her father's ominous self-restraint as by his direct warning, Mary Anne was more guarded in her words. But this very reticence only gave emphasis to her silences, her sighs, and her actions. In truth she was believing that she must give up her dreams of George Vivian's ever becoming her lover. If what they whispered about Edgar was true, that would debar it. It seemed as good as an old ballad—a romantic episode which rarely had had place in life. A crime had been committed and a sister must be sacrificed! Apart from that, it was understood that George's life would probably be a very short one; that he might die before the General; in which case Edgar would be heir to the Court. But—were criminals, though undetected, allowed by law to succeed? Meanwhile Viscount Rockford called frequently at Moorland House, and was very attentive to her, and sympathising. But perhaps he meant nothing—men were so puzzling.

In the midst of genuine grief for her brother's fate, thoughts like these were often agitating Mary Anne Grale's breast, and issuing in many fantastic and inconsistent words and deeds. A rather dramatic depression would give way to a very natural fit of gaiety when the

Viscount appeared on the scene, yet would return very prettily during the interview. Mary Anne was beginning to believe that the Viscount really liked her; that he would probably ask her to be his wife: and she told herself that she should never care for him as she had cared for George Vivian. But Lord Rockford did not possess George Vivian's attractions.

There were two people in Dering who felt ready, in those days, to wonder at and blame their own gladness in such a world of woe. And those two were Charlie Carr and Lettice Palmer. For Charles's invention had proved an undoubted success, and his way to competency and even fortune was made clear, so that Lettice wore a betrothal ring without disguise. It was very early days yet; still they had dared to begin to think of marriage. Charles had been offered a good appointment in a manufacturing town, upon which he might enter in the autumn; and why need he go alone, to encounter the discomfort and loneliness of temporary lodgings, when he might have a dear little wife to help him lay the foundations of a permanent home?

They wanted to fight their own battle, those two young people; they felt so strong and brave in their pure young love. The money which Charles had received for his invention would enable him to furnish a modest little house, "quite as much as I am equal to manage," remarked Lettice. And the bride would take nothing from home except a sensible trousseau, and an abundant supply of household naperies, for she chose to follow the fashion of former days, which assigned that duty to the bride. Upon true hearts, in their joy, the woe of others strikes a very sharp blow. Lettice felt as if she could for ever ask pardon of her sister Agnes, for being so happy when she was so sad. If Agnes would have said a word—if she would have wept—if she would have broken down in any way, it would not have been so dreadful! But to see her going about, with her cold, still face, was almost more than Lettice could bear.

Their father did not conceal from them a fact which came to his knowledge very soon after the inquest. It was indeed a fact of his seeking out. He knew he could trust his daughters' discretion and silence, and somehow he felt as if he could not bear to withhold from Agnes aught concerning the mystery which he knew lay day and night upon her heart. Besides, it was not a secret he alone could keep. Others had to know of it. He himself had to tell it to Mr. Grale. Better that Agnes should hear it, told sadly in her own home, than that it should start up, any day, like a snake on some unlikely byeway.

It concerned that instrument which had been so strangely returned to Webster, the watchmaker, by some person unknown.

Directly after the inquest, Dr. Palmer had written to ask Webster to send the hammer to him. Webster sent it willingly enough, with a note, in which he said it had not been used since it was returned to him the previous year. Dr. Palmer caused the hammer to be submit-

ted to chemical investigation, which showed that there was blood upon it. Mr. Holmes, of Sladford, examining the hammer with Dr. Palmer, agreed with him that it was just the instrument likely to have inflicted the wound which the dead man received; in fact, they both believed this self-same instrument had been the one to inflict it.

Mr. Grale's lawyer was for bringing Edgar Vivian to trial. He thought much of this additional presumptive evidence.

"It is not sufficient," dissented the doctors, who were not so ready to rush into law as the other was. "If a man gets tried upon insufficient evidence, and is acquitted, he can't be tried again, you know," said they.

One day Miss Vivian took a short railway journey for the purpose of giving instructions concerning some little special article she wished to present to Charles and Lettice as a wedding gift. It was the first time she had gone out of Dering since the passing of the events told of; and she had to own to herself that the change of scene, unexciting though it was, the fresh fields and hedgerows, the unaccustomed faces and streets in the country town to which she resorted, seemed very refreshing. As she settled herself in the railway carriage for the return journey, she was aware of a strange faint reassertion of her old calm and cheerfulness. She did not resent this, as stormier natures often do. She said to herself that nature will in time clothe the harshest precipices with softest moss and fairest flowers; that nature will heal the wounded limb so that it is once more fit to encounter work and weariness; she might have gone on to reflect that nature will re-vitalise the broken spirit, so that it again becomes conscious of balms, or blows. And then she might have proceeded to ask herself which way the next blow would fall. Instead of that, in her newly re-stirred interest in life, she took up a newspaper which some previous passenger had left behind him.

It was a society journal. Maria read what was to be the new fashion in bonnets; and how the Duchess of X—— had had her portrait painted as a jockey; and that the heir to the Earldom of Y—— was going to marry the heiress of a City merchant's fortune. Then her eye wandered on to a longer paragraph in closer type. It was headed "The Midland Mystery," and it ran thus:

"We understand that our sensational novelists might make a fortune out of the rumours and romances attaching to this singular tragedy. It is even whispered in legal and detective circles that a trial for murder may be looked for, which will contain all the true elements of a cause célèbre. Whether this prove true or not, there is no doubt that local fame—or infamy—points an unwavering finger of accusation towards the popular scion of an old and respected county family. The latest report is that the instrument by which the unfortunate young man, Allan Grale, met his death, has been found with his blood still upon it, and that the links connecting it with the hand of his assassin are neither few nor far between."

The paper fell from Maria's hand. By instinct, as it seemed, the truth flashed on her mind—that the "scion" pointed at was Edgar Vivian.

That some trivial surmises and doubts had been whispered by the foolish village gossips, as to the appointed meeting (or non-meeting) of Edgar and Allan at the Black Pool, Maria knew. But that suspicion could seriously attach itself to her brother, she had never dreamed.

"It is not true," she said to herself aloud, in the empty carriage. "These newspaper men make paragraphs of what they know nothing! Our Dering people really suspect Edgar? Never! I don't think they could even believe it of him if he were found guilty: for they know he never could be guilty."

So lost in thought was Maria, that when the train began to draw up in the Dering station, she scarcely noticed it, until a porter's voice, speaking the family name, caught her ear. He was repeating sundry instructions to a fellow porter concerning some boxes of choice fruit.

"I tell you it is. Mr. Vivian gave the order when he was down here this morning."

"Mr. Vivian?" echoed the other. "I didn't think he was well enough to be going about."

"I don't mean Mr. George," said the porter, testily; "I mean Cain."

Maria stepped, white and breathless upon the platform. The newspaper men were right then! Was this all the faith which her race had earned by generations of honourable men and women?—by years of genial kindliness? Oh, how base people could be! What a cruel world it was! She stood still one moment, and then her mind was made up.

She started off, at a rate which seemed strangely inconsistent with her fragile figure and worn face. As she went, she muttered to herself mechanically:

"The plain truth!—the plain truth!"

She never paused, even to take breath, till she stood before the Grale Works. She had hardly voice to ask for the master, and the startled office boy, astonished at seeing Miss Vivian, ushered her into the counting-house.

The clerks were gone, and Mr. Grale was there alone. But Maria would scarcely have noticed whether that was so or not.

A strange, stony hardness settled on the manufacturer's face when he saw who it was that had invaded his privacy. He rose; but he did not offer her a seat, nor did she take one; though she put her hands on the back of a chair as if for support.

"Mr. Grale!" she gasped, "Mr. Grale! They are saying in the place, that Edgar killed your son Allan!"

"Well," said Mr. Grale, slowly and heavily, "I cannot help that."

"But it cannot be true. It is not true!"

"Not true? Ask him."

Maria was taken with a fit of shivering. What did it all mean? Her thoughts were busy, full of tumult, and there was a pause of silence.

"Mr. Grale," she impulsively cried, gazing at him and reading too surely that he at least believed the accusation, "do you know about the diamond cross?"

"Mr. Grale looked at her with surprised and angry eyes, in which however there lay a certain pain. "The diamond cross?" he repeated. "I know all about the diamond cross. There is not much to know, Miss Vivian. It is safe in our possession. It lies in my wife's jewel box."

"Are you quite sure?" whispered Maria.

"I am quite sure," replied Mr. Grale. "I saw it there myself bu a few days ago. Why do you come to me to ask this?"

"It—is—there!" repeated Maria, as if unable to take in the fact.

"It is."

Maria did not shriek; she did not faint; but her hands relaxed their grasp of the chair helplessly, and fell by her side. As Mr. Grale moved forward to her assistance, her lips parted to speak, but closed again in silence. Turning, she walked to the room door; and when she had passed through it, she halted to look back at Mr. Grale.

Staggering, like one who has been dealt some great blow, Maria set off to walk to the Court, and Mr. Grale sat down to his desk again.

Half an hour later, the blacksmith, taking an evening stroll with his next-door neighbour, came upon Miss Vivian lying in a dead faint among the long grass by the roadside. With kindly, reverent hands, they raised her head and the neighbour ran for some water. But she gave no sign of returning consciousness.

"I reckon Mr. Edgar Vivian may have another life to answer for as well as young Grale's," whispered the smith to his neighbour.

"That's so," was the answer. "Hush! she's coming to. Look!"

(To be continued.)

THE AMETHYST SEAL.

By T. W. Speight, Author of "In the Dead of Night."

I.

THE turret clock struck two.

Luncheon was just over at Wenlock Towers, and on the terrace two young men were pacing slowly, smoking their cigars and talking between the whiffs. They were both tall and good-looking. One of them was Bruce Wenlock, a captain in a crack cavalry regiment, and the eldest son of Sir George Wenlock, the owner of the Towers. The other was his half-cousin, Harold Dare, at present a junior clerk in Her Majesty's Office of the Green Wand.

Young Wenlock was dark, with black hair and a heavy moustache. His face was a very pleasant one, especially when he smiled, and his eyes looked into yours with a frankness and candour that were almost boyish. He spoke with a slight lisp which many people took to be an affectation, whereas it was a natural defect and one which he could not help.

Dare had light hair and steel-blue eyes, and his face was closely shaven. His features were good, but their expression was hard and somewhat cynical. There was a certain undefinable something in his face that made him look several years older than he was.

It was a bright, frosty afternoon, and the time was some three weeks before Christmas. The house had been full of company. There had been shooting, riding, dancing, charades, amateur-acting, and unlimited flirtation. But the guests were now gone—all except Harold Dare, who was, however, looked upon almost as one of the family—and he was going back to town by the evening train.

"If you are really as fond of her as you say you are, why don't you ask her to marry you? I don't know a prettier or a better girl than Elinor Trenton." The speaker was Captain Wenlock.

The other gave his shoulders an expressive shrug, and took another whiff at his cigar before answering. Then he said: "That she is both pretty and good I fully agree with you, and certainly I never cared for anyone else in the way I care for her. But look at the position. I am a pauper; Miss Trenton is a pauper; and neither of us has much prospect of ever being anything else. My dear Bruce, I am not equal to such a prospect."

"Your bachelor life in London has made a coward of you," returned Captain Wenlock. "What is a man worth who would not dare anything for the sake of winning the girl of his heart? There are worse ills in life than poverty."

"As if you knew the meaning of the word, or were ever likely to do so!" answered Dare, with a half-veiled sneer. "I admire your enthusiasm, but I cannot imitate it. No! I will hie me back to my lonely chambers, and try to think of the witching smiles and sunny eyes of sweet Elinor Trenton as being so many luxuries beyond a poor man's reach."

For a few minutes the two men walked and smoked in silence.

"I rather fancy my father would like you and Elinor to make a match of it," remarked Captain Wenlock, presently.

Dare favoured his companion with a swift, keen glance out of his steel-blue eyes, but did not answer in words.

"By the bye," said Harold, presently, "what has become of that young fellow—Boyd I think his name was—to whom I was introduced when I was down here last? It seemed to me at the time that he was rather sweet on Miss Trenton."

"James Boyd, you mean, and a very nice fellow. He is a railway engineer, and has gone out to Buenos Ayres. I certainly was inclined to think that Elinor had found a weak place in his armour; but I don't believe any real harm was done. In any case, it's a far cry to South America, and, as he has gone out under a three years' agreement, he is not likely to trouble you for some time to come."

Again the two young men took a turn or two in silence. Then Bruce said: "I am going down to the post-office presently. You may as well walk as far with me, and I daresay Elinor will go also. It is a shame to stay indoors on such a lovely afternoon."

"All right," answered Harold, a little absently.

Bruce stopped in his walk, and putting his hand into the breast pocket of his shooting-jacket, he drew therefrom a long blue envelope, sealed with a great splash of red wax. "If this could reveal its secrets it might tell us something worth knowing," he said, with a little laugh, as he turned it over in his fingers.

"What is it?" asked Harold, and his keen eyes looked as if they would like to pierce the envelope and get at the secrets within.

"It is a draft of the governor's will," answered Bruce, as he replaced the document in his pocket, "which he is sending to his lawyers, Symes and Symes, of Bedford Row. He was engaged all the morning in drawing it up, and has asked me to post it for him in person."

"Do you mean to say that my uncle"—he always spoke of the baronet in that relation—"has not made his will before now?"

"It seems like it, although I had no knowledge of the fact. I fancy he has some sort of superstitious prejudice against making his will: many people have; but since that last attack I suppose he has made up his mind to delay no longer."

In a little while Bruce spoke again. "I hope with all my heart that he has not forgotten either you or Elinor in it," he said

earnestly; "though I do not think it at all likely that he would do so."

This was a generous-hearted wish on the part of Bruce Wenlock, seeing that he was his father's only son, and that whatever was bequeathed to others would be so much loss to himself.

Dare threw a quick glance at his companion's face.

"I believe he really means what he says," he muttered to himself. He had a vague feeling that were he in Bruce's place no such wish would emanate from him.

Presently Bruce went indoors to write a note, after which the cousins were to walk down to the village together. Harold was not sorry to be left alone for a little while.

One remark of Bruce's had set him thinking; had indeed driven his thoughts into quite a new channel. His cousin had said: "If this could reveal its secrets it might tell us something worth knowing." Harold could not get these words out of his mind. It would indeed be a secret worth knowing if he could by any means ascertain the baronet's intentions with regard to himself. No one but himself knew how near he was to the verge of ruin. Not much longer would Mr. Shadrach wait for his money unless he could prove to that astute individual's satisfaction that a policy of delay would bring him in more substantial advantages in time to come. Sir George had made him an allowance of two hundred a year ever since he had entered on his duties at the office of the Green Wand, so that he was scarcely likely to forget him in his will. But the question was as to the limit which the baronet in such a case would set to his generosity. Would he think five thousand pounds too little to bequeath to the son of his cousin? would he think ten thousand pounds too much? or was it not just possible that Sir George might satisfy his conscience by bequeathing him a paltry legacy of one or two thousand only? What would he not give for a glimpse at the paper at that moment in Bruce Wenlock's pocket!

Then again as regarded Elinor Trenton, although she was only Sir George's ward and no relation at all, he was almost sure to remember her in his will. He had no daughter of his own and did not disguise his liking for Elinor. What more natural than that he should put her name down for a legacy of five or six thousand pounds. If he, Harold, could only assure himself that such was the fact he would propose to her at once. He was in love with her as much as it was in his nature to be in love with anyone, but as he had told himself over and over again, he could not afford to marry a penniless wife. If only some wizard would put that red-sealed paper into his hands for three minutes, what a chapter of the future would be revealed to him! Were there no possible means, fair or unfair—in such a case it would be foolish to stick at trifles—by which he could obtain a sight at it? No: none, none!

He sighed, lit a fresh cigar, and continued his solitary pacing to and fro. A few minutes later he was joined by Captain Wenlock and Miss Trenton, and the three set off to walk to the village post-office, three quarters of a mile away.

Harold Dare might well be excused for falling in love with Elinor Trenton. She was in truth a girl that seemed to overflow with sunshine and happiness. Melancholy and she seemed as far as the poles asunder. And yet she was entirely dependent, just now, on the bounty of Sir George, and with no future worth speaking of from a worldly point of view. It was her nature to be happy, and to make those around her the same, as far as lay in her power, and she never tried to be different.

It was pleasant walking along the dry, hard, country roads, that bright frosty afternoon. Dare, who had usually an easy flow of conversation in whatever company he might happen to find himself, was to-day more distrait and silent than usual. The same thought that had filled his mind on the terrace was still at work here, and would not be put aside. Thus it fell out that the Captain and Miss Trenton had most of the conversation to themselves.

The Stilwater post-office was also a draper's shop. As, however, the captain's letters were already stamped there was no occasion for him to go inside. He took the letters out of his pocket, glanced once more at the addresses on them, and then dropped them one by one into the box. The last to leave his fingers was the blue envelope with the red seal. Harold Dare felt as though he should like to follow it into the letter-box. It was gone, irrevocably gone!

They decided to return home by a different and a longer route, which would prolong their walk. It was past five when they reached the Towers. Dinner to-day was to be an early and informal affair, as Harold would have to leave almost as soon as it was over; besides which, Sir George was too indisposed to leave his room, and his sister, Mrs. Borrowdaile, was away visiting, so that the young people would dine by themselves.

When Harold reached his room he began mechanically to pack his belongings. He had one largish portmanteau and a small Gladstone bag. When the process was completed he sat down in an easy chair in front of his dressing-room fire, and leaning back with his hands behind his head, fell once more into a brown study. The subject of his thoughts was the same that it had been before. If only—if only he could obtain a sight of that rough draft of his uncle's will! If only he knew the best or the worst, he could then decide in what way to meet that future which was now coming so imminently upon him!

He had sat for full ten minutes without moving, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, when he suddenly sprang to his feet. His face flushed and then grew pale.

"By Jove," he muttered to himself. The exclamation was a

commonplace one, but the way he gave utterance to it meant a great deal. Then he sat down again and fell to staring into the fire, as though in the glowing embers he saw bodied forth some vision or picture projected from his own mental retina.

He was still sitting thus when the first bell rang. This roused him. He rose and pushed back his chair, and as he did so he said aloud : " I'll do it and take the risk."

If Harold Dare had seemed dull and out of sorts in the afternoon no one could have complained of his lack of spirits at dinner that evening. He laughed and joked and talked enough nonsense for two men. But his gaiety had something forced and feverish about it, and he drank considerably more wine than was customary with him. Elinor looked at him once or twice with a little wonder, but the Captain thought to himself that he had never seen his cousin " in better form."

After dinner there was time for a little music. Elinor sang a couple of songs. Dare turned over her music and hovered round her with the air and empressement of a devoted suitor. Miss Trenton neither encouraged nor repulsed him, but treated him precisely as she treated Captain Wenlock. She had often puzzled Harold before, and she puzzled him again this evening ; but just then he had other matters to occupy his thoughts.

Presently the wheels of the dogcart were heard crunching the gravel on the drive. The time had come to say good-bye. It had been the captain's intention to drive his cousin to the station, but Sir George having intimated his desire that his son should spare an hour or two after dinner to look through some business papers, a groom had been deputed to take charge of the dogcart.

Sir George—a fine specimen of an English country gentleman, but at present sadly out of health—bade his young kinsman a cordial farewell, told him not to fail to come and see them at Christmas, and then slipped an envelope into his unreluctant palm, which, on opening later on, he found to contain a cheque for a hundred guineas.

Next came Harold's farewell to Elinor. He would fain have thrown a sort of veiled tenderness over their parting, and was desirous that an aroma of sentiment should cling to it. But the laughter in Miss Trenton's eyes dismayed him from trying any such experiment. So, as it fell out, they parted gaily enough, like acquaintances who might or who might not meet again in a little while.

A warm grip of the hand from Bruce Wenlock, and then Harold Dare climbed into the dogcart, and buttoned his ulster about him. His black bag was under the seat ; his portmanteau was to follow him on the morrow.

" To Barrowcliff station, I suppose, sir ? " said Perkins, as they passed through the lodge gates.

" No ; to Thorndale station. That will suit me better."

Not another word spoke he, but puffed at his cigar in grim silence till the lights of the station came in view, and the four miles' drive was at an end. Then he took his bag, saw the groom set off on the road home, and made his way towards the booking-office.

II.

The village of Stilwater, where Captain Wenlock posted his letters, may be said to form the apex of an irregular triangle, of which the railway stations of Barrowcliff and Thorndale formed the respective points of the base. It was rather more than four miles from Stilwater to Thorndale, and rather more than five miles from the same place to Barrowcliff. Both the stations were on one of the direct trunk lines from south to north, and vice-versâ. Barrowcliff was a manufacturing town of some pretensions, whereas Thorndale was nothing but a pretty hamlet—but it was a hamlet round which were clustered the mansions of several county magnates, and for that reason, if for no other, a considerable number of trains, both up and down, were timed to call at the little station.

As a consequence of there being no station at Stilwater, the post-bags pertaining to that place were conveyed by mail-cart to and from Barrowcliff, a fact of which Mr. Harold Dare was thoroughly cognisant.

That gentleman, after bidding the groom good-night, went inside the station and devoted a full quarter of an hour to a study of the different time-tables suspended on the booking-office walls. Then, as soon as the little window was opened, he proceeded to take his ticket, but not, as anyone would have supposed, for London, but for Barrowcliff, five miles in the opposite direction. A few minutes later the down train steamed into the station, and a quarter of an hour after that Dare alighted at the place for which he had booked. He glanced at the station clock as he did so and saw that it was half-past eight.

No one there was likely to know him, and he entered the refreshment-room without hesitation. The night was very cold, and a little hot grog under such circumstances is allowable. Then he filled his pocket-flask with brandy, lit a cigar, and sallied forth. On his way through the town he called at a chemist's shop and made a small purchase. The station at Barrowcliff was in the suburbs of the town, and in a little while Dare had left the streets behind him, and found himself on the quiet country road that led to Stilwater. It was requisite that he should now time his movements with great accuracy. He took out his watch under the last gas lamp, before plunging into the darkness of the country, and found that he had still ample time for his purpose. The night was clear and frosty ; the stars gleamed in the sky like shining points of steel.

Harold went on his way, scarcely meeting a creature, until he reached a point on which he had fixed previously in his own mind. A little way back from the road, on a piece of waste land, stood the carcases, as they are called, of two new houses which had never been completed, in all probability because the builder had fallen short of funds. They had been standing untouched any time these two years, and Harold had noticed them more than once when journeying between Stilwater and Barrowcliff. Nothing could well look more desolate and forlorn. They were so many bare walls of bare brick, roofed in with bare slates, and that was all; windowless and doorless they stood, open to all the winds that blew.

When Dare reached this lonely spot he came to a stand. For full two minutes he stood without moving, listening intently. For any sound of human life that he could hear he might have been the last man left alive in the world. Satisfied that he had nothing to fear on the score of being seen or heard, he crossed the patch of weed-covered ground and entered one of the unfinished houses. Here he halted and struck a match, with which he lighted a small bull's-eye lantern which he produced from his bag. Throwing the rays of the lantern before him, so as to save himself from stumbling over any obstacle which might chance to be in his path, he passed forward into one of the back rooms, where he felt that he would be still safer from the observation of any chance passer-by. Then opening his bag again he brought forth from its recesses a black wig and a thick black moustache, which had formed part of his "make-up" when playing the character of Captain Hawtree in a scene from *Caste* at Wenlock Towers. The wig he proceeded to draw on over his own closely-cropped head of light hair; while the moustache was readily fixed in its place by the aid of a little spirit-gum. His next proceeding was to substitute for the low-crowned felt hat he had been wearing a high-crowned opera hat which he had brought with him, shut up, in his bag. Then having tied a thick white muffler round his neck, he felt that his disguise was complete.

Leaving his bag in a corner of the unfinished house, but taking his lantern with him after having turned on the dark slide, Harold Dare issued forth, and after listening intently for a few seconds he crossed the waste ground to the high road, and then set off at a rapid pace in the direction of Stilwater.

The mail-cart between Stilwater and Barrowcliff had been driven by one man for thirty years. His name was John Pegram, and he had now turned his sixtieth birthday. John's jolly, rubicund visage was known to everybody, and everybody averred that he was no one's enemy but his own. It was universally believed, however, that John could drive better when he was "half seas over" than when he was perfectly sober; and as for his old bay mare, you had only to put her head in the direction you wanted her to go and she required no driving at all.

John left the post-office at Stilwater with the mail-bags for London and the South between half-past nine and a quarter to ten every night, so as to be in time to catch the up-mail at Barrowcliff station at 10.30. Of this fact Harold Dare was perfectly aware, he and Captain Wenlock having met the old man more than once when out on summer evenings for a late walk along the country roads, and it was of this knowledge that Dare had now determined to avail himself. He had timed his calculations with a view of encountering the mail-cart about half way between the village and the station, at a spot where, for a mile or more, the road ran between two high banks covered with thick hedgerows. He was aware that John, out of pure good nature, or it may be with an eye to an extra glass of grog, although it was contrary to his instructions, sometimes gave a lift on the cart to some belated friend or acquaintance whom he might chance to overtake on the road, and he could only hope most devotedly that to-night of all nights the old driver might be alone.

As soon as Dare reached that part of the road where it began to dip between the high banks he slackened his pace somewhat, and after every few yards that he advanced he stood still for a few seconds to listen. He had advanced thus cautiously for about half a mile when his quick ears caught the faint sound of wheels in the distance. His heart gave a great bound, and he was obliged to steady himself for a few moments against the trunk of a tree. The sound could now be plainly heard coming towards him on the frost-hardened road. At once he turned and began to retrace his steps in the direction of Barrowcliff. The vehicle, whatever it might be, came nearer and nearer, till in a little while it was but a few yards behind him. Now or never was his chance.

Halting suddenly and flinging a quick backward glance into the darkness he could just make out that it was indeed the mail cart, and that there was only one figure on the box.

"Ith that you, John Pegwam?" he called out, with a capital imitation of his cousin's voice and lisp.

"Aye, it's me, sure enough. And who may you be?" came the answer, while the old mare, hearing voices, slackened her pace of her own accord.

"Don't you know me? Captain Wenlock."

"Blest if I knew you, sir, it's so dark hereabouts. Woa, Tulip, lass." The mare came to a dead halt. "Can I do anything for you, Captain?"

"You can give me a lift as far as the station, if you like. The night was so fine I started to walk, but I'm afraid I shall miss my train." All this was said with a lisp precisely as Bruce Wenlock would have spoken it.

"All right, Captain. I'm in good time, to-night. Just put your foot on that step and catch hold of this strap and there you are."

Five seconds later Harold Dare was sitting by the side of John

Pegram, and Tulip had resumed her jog-trot pace on her way to the station.

John had known Bruce Wenlock ever since the latter was a youth home from school for his holidays, and had had more than one half-crown from him for doing little commissions in Barrowcliff for the young man. It is scarcely needful to say that the old driver had not the slightest suspicion that the man sitting by his side was other than he had represented himself to be.

Dare, who had heard mention made of John's convivial propensities, at once perceived that the old man had not started on his cold drive without getting what he himself would have termed pretty well "primed" beforehand. This state of things to a certain extent helped forward the end Dare had in view, inasmuch as John would be likely to succumb more readily to further temptation in the same direction. In fact, they had not gone more than a hundred yards before Dare said: "This is the sort of weather when a man feels the want of something warm inside to fight against the cold outside." With that he drew his flask from his pocket, opened it, poured some of the contents into the cup, and pretended to drink it off. Then pouring a quantity more into the cup he handed it to John. "Swallow this, old boy; you will find it do you good," he said.

John drew Tulip up into a walk, and took the flask in his left hand. He was quite aware that he had already taken as much, or more, perhaps, than was good for him. But the odour of the brandy was sweet to him, and the night was certainly very cold, and his conscience was not in the habit of making much of a fight on such occasions. The natural consequence ensued: he hesitated, and was lost. Lifting the silver cup to his lips, he swallowed the contents at one huge gulp.

The spirit was potent, and John coughed a little as he jogged Tulip to get up her pace again. "That's strong stuff, captain, and it's got a queer twang with it," he said. "What may be the name of it, now?"

"It's Dutch brandy; what the mynheers drink in Holland."

"Ah, I've heard say as how they are a rum lot over there."

It was not Dare's policy to talk, so he made no reply. But if he did not talk he watched his companion keenly. The crucial moment was at hand.

Presently John Pegram's head began to nod ominously. He pulled himself up with a jerk, yawned, and rubbed his eyes with his disengaged hand. For two or three minutes all went well. Then his head began to nod again, then he drew himself up again, but not so successfully as before. One or two further faint struggles he made, but in vain. His eyes felt as if they had leaden weights on them, a numbness crept through all his limbs, his chin sank forward on his chest; John was fast asleep. One hand still grasped the reins; he was kept from falling by the strap round his waist, which was securely

buckled to the iron-work of his seat. Tulip, unconscious that anything out of the ordinary was happening behind her, jogged quietly on her way.

Nothing happened to mar Harold Dare's scheme. They met one or two vehicles returning from Barrowcliff, and three or four belated pedestrians, but the sight of two people instead of one on the box of the mail-cart was not so unusual as to call for particular notice. Here and there they passed a farm-house, but the lights were all extinguished, and the inmates in bed long ago. And so, after what seemed to Harold a greater number of hours than they were minutes in reality, the mail cart reached the waste plot of ground on which stood the two unfinished houses. Here Harold contrived to get possession of the reins, although not without a little difficulty. John's fingers seemed to grip them instinctively, sound asleep though he was, and even after they had been taken from him his hand still kept its shape and position as before.

An admonitory tug brought Tulip to a stand. Harold listened with all his might for the sound of anything that might be approaching either from one direction or the other; but all was silence, the most profound. Then he turned the mare's head towards the waste ground, and leaping down, led her round a gable of the empty houses, and so to the back of them, where nothing could be seen from the high road. This done, he climbed into the cart again and turned on the light of his bull's-eye.

The mail bags were contained in a receptacle at the back of the cart, the lid of which was simply fastened with a hasp. The first bag that Harold drew out was the very one he wanted. It bore a brass label with the word "London" on it, and its mouth was tied round with string, sealed with coarse red wax. Harold's sharp penknife quickly cut through the string, and then the bag was open to his hand.

The correspondence between Stilwater and the outer world was, as a rule, not very voluminous, and the bag was only about one third full. Harold's eager fingers had little difficulty in finding the particular packet they were in search of, seeming to close on it instinctively the moment they touched it. Satisfying himself by a single glance that he had not made a mistake, he thrust the packet into his breast-pocket, blew out his lantern, hurriedly tied up the mouth of the bag, put it back amongst the other bags, shut down the lid, and leaped lightly to the ground.

Then entering the empty house, Dare quickly found his own bag in the corner where he had left it. It was a work of very little time to divest himself of his wig, moustache, opera-hat, and white muffler. Then taking his bag in one hand, he went back to the mail-cart, and leading Tulip by the head, they were all presently on the solitary high road again. The mare's head was turned in the direction of Stilwater, the reins were replaced in John's unconscious fingers, and

Tulip being bidden to "gee-up," started off at a brisk trot, being probably quite aware that she was on her way back to the stable. That night the Stilwater letter-bag never reached London.

Having seen the mail-cart and its sleeping driver disappear in the darkness, Harold Dare set off at a rapid pace on his way back to Barrowcliff. He reached the station in due course, but by that time the London mail had gone—for which he was not sorry—after waiting five minutes beyond its specified time for the Stilwater bags. But the down mail to the north was due in a quarter of an hour, and by that he booked. Two hours later he found himself in Manchester. There he stayed the night, and travelled up to town by an early train, but by a different route, next morning.

All this time he had kept the stolen packet unopened in his pocket. Impatient as he was to master the secret of its contents, he deemed it best not to attempt to open the envelope till the proper means for doing so were ready to his hand. In his rooms he had a spirit-lamp, with an apparatus for making coffee. With the jet of steam from this he carefully melted the seal, and by the same means removed the stamps which had been defaced at the Stilwater post-office. Then he was free to read that for which he had run so many risks.

He sat down in his easy chair trembling with excitement, and drew the folded foolscap from its envelope. His uncle's crabbed writing was familiar to him, and he had no difficulty in deciphering it. His eye skimmed the manuscript rapidly, taking no note of details, till on the third page he found the first mention of his own name. "To my kinsman, Harold Dare, I bequeath the sum of eight thousand pounds."

Eight thousand pounds! It was more, far more, than his hopes had dared to foreshadow. All would yet be well with him. His heart gave a great throb of relief, the hand that held the paper dropped by his side; for the moment he was overcome.

But there was something else that he was almost equally anxious to see. He turned over another page, and there found what he was looking for. "To my beloved ward, Elinor Trenton, who has been to me as a dear daughter, I bequeath the sum of six thousand pounds."

Why, this was better and better! Harold felt that he had never loved Elinor nearly so much as at that moment; never had she seemed so dear to him before. He made up his mind there and then that he would propose to her at Christmas, and he had a sufficiently good opinion of himself to feel little doubt as to the result. His star was evidently in the ascendant.

When he had in some measure recovered his equanimity he read the draft through carefully, clause by clause. There was nothing else in it that interested him. Of course the bulk of everything went to his cousin, Bruce—it could not be otherwise.

Now that he had ascertained all that it behoved him to know, the

question arose as to the best and safest mode of forwarding the document to its destination so that no suspicion that it had been tampered with should be aroused in the mind of its recipient. He lit a cigar and lay back in his chair, with his eyes fixed on one corner of the ceiling. By the time his smoke was finished he had made up his mind as to the safest course to pursue. He would replace the manuscript in its original envelope; it would never do to put it into a fresh one and address it in his own writing; and would carefully seal it up again. Only, and here was the rub, he would have to make use of a seal of his own wherewith to impress the wax, which, as a matter of course, would be altogether different from the one used by Sir George. He could not see that the difference would matter. How was Mr. Symes to know that the seal was other than his client's?

Going into his dressing-room he unlocked an old-fashioned bureau which stood there, and took out of one of the drawers a certain amethyst seal, set in gold, which once upon a time had belonged to his father. It was one of those ponderous seals which gentlemen used to wear attached to their watches, some forty or fifty years ago. How it had come into his father's possession, Harold had never heard. It was beautifully cut. On the upper side were two hands clasped as if in friendship; underneath the hands was a dagger, point downwards; and below that the one word *Désormais*. No one knew that he had such a seal in his possession; what could be safer than to make use of it in an emergency such as the present?

Accordingly the envelope was reclosed, and the hot wax stamped with the impress of the amethyst seal. Then fresh postage stamps were affixed over the place where the original ones had been, and then there was nothing more to do save to drop the packet into the nearest pillar box. He waited till dusk before doing this. Then with a sigh of relief that his dangerous task was safely over, he turned and walked slowly in the direction of his club.

III.

The "Robbery of the Stilwater Mail," as it was called, was a regular godsend to the newspapers, big and little, happening, as it did, at that dead season of the year which comes just before Christmas. But a mystery it was at the beginning, and a mystery it seemed likely to remain to the end of the chapter.

Captain Wenlock had no difficulty in proving an alibi. Indeed, all who knew him ridiculed the idea of his being mixed up in any way in such an affair. He had plenty of witnesses to vouch that he had never left home on the evening in question. Still, the affair annoyed both him and Sir George considerably.

On the second day after the discovery, Sir George said to his son: "You had better telegraph to Symes and ask him whether he has received the draft of the will all right." So the Captain rode into

Barrowcliff and sent off his message, and waited for the reply, which was: "Draft of will safely to hand." So the baronet's mind was set at rest on that score.

About a week later Mr. Symes in person arrived at Wenlock Towers. He brought with him Sir George's will, drawn up in due form, in accordance with the instructions which he had received. He dined and slept at the Towers, and had an interview with the Baronet in his own room next morning. The will was read over and approved of. The Vicar of the parish and Mr. Selwyn of Crombie, who were to act as witnesses, would arrive a little later on and stay to luncheon.

When Mr. Symes had finished reading the will, he said to his client: "Here is the draft, Sir George, which I received from you by post. I thought it best to give it back into your own hands."

"It's only so much waste paper now, and may as well be burnt. By-the-bye, it was posted the very night the London bag was broken open by some scoundrel who personated my son. I suppose, however, that you received it in the course of the following day?"

"No, I didn't," returned the lawyer. "This envelope, as you may see for yourself, if you care to examine it, bears the Stilwater postmark of December 3rd, the London postmark of the 4th, and it reached my office by the first delivery on the morning of the 5th."

Sir George rang for his son. "I thought you told me," he said to Bruce, "that the letters which were in the bag that was broken open on the night of the 3rd, were sent on by the six o'clock train next morning, and would be delivered in London by mid-day or a little later?"

"That is quite correct, sir."

"Yet Symes tells me he didn't receive the draft of the will till the morning of the fifth."

"That is certainly very singular," answered Bruce.

The draft, still in its original envelope, was on the table. Bruce took it up with a view of examining the postmarks, but the moment his eye fell on the seal, which was still intact—Mr. Symes, in his business-like way, having cut carefully round it with a penknife, when opening the envelope—the expression of his countenance changed.

"When I posted this document, sir," he said, turning to his father, "I certainly did not notice that you had fastened it up with a seal that I had never seen before."

"Eh—what!" exclaimed the Baronet. "I only sealed it with the seal I always use."

Bruce handed him the envelope without another word. Sir George put on his spectacles and crossed to the window and examined the seal minutely. "Symes—Bruce," he exclaimed presently in a hollow voice, "this envelope has been tampered with! This is no seal of mine; I never saw it before."

The three men looked at each other in consternation. On what followed it is not needful that we should dwell. The whole affair

was shrouded in mystery. The more they asked themselves who could possibly have done it, and what end the person who did it could have had in view, the more bewildered they became. After a long discussion, the only conclusion they could arrive at was, that the document must have been abstracted from the letter bag—together probably with others—on the supposition that it contained notes or negotiable securities of some kind, and that when it was found to contain nothing of value, it had been resealed and forwarded to its destination.

Sir George was much put about by the affair. It seemed to dwell in his mind even more than the fact of his son having been personated by some unknown scoundrel. It worried him and irritated him beyond measure.

But at the very time Mr. Symes was at the Towers, another link in the same chain of circumstances was being forged elsewhere. On the same evening that the lawyer and Captain Wenlock dined together, Harold Dare was dining at a friend's house in the suburbs of London. The weather was very bad, and Harold, who hated discomfort of any kind, was easily persuaded into accepting a bed for the night. Next morning, on his way back to the office, he found that he had left his keys at home overnight, and was consequently compelled to drive round there in the hansom he had engaged at the station. On entering his rooms he was astounded to find that they had been broken into during his absence, and the whole place rifled. He sent at once for the police, and while they were examining the premises, he proceeded to make out an inventory of the stolen property.

If the burglars had expected to find much property of value in Harold's rooms, they must have been woefully disappointed. Harold was not rich enough to have much spare jewellery over and above that which he usually wore, but all that there was they had made a clean sweep of. A couple of five-pound notes, which had been in a drawer of his writing-desk, were also missing. But what he, perhaps, regretted more than all the rest was an old-fashioned watch that had belonged to his father, a diamond and pearl brooch that had been his mother's, and—the amethyst seal.

He enumerated each article that had been stolen, describing them as far as his memory served him, but when he handed the list to the police, it was with a rueful foreboding that he would never see or hear anything more of his property.

On the morning of the 23rd of December, Harold Dare left London to spend his Christmas at Wenlock Towers. He took half-a-dozen newspapers with him in the train, and he amused himself on the way down by picking out and reading their latest comments on what they had now come to term "The Stilwater Mystery." By this time there was little more left for them to say than that up to the latest date the police had failed in obtaining any clue to the perpetrator of this remarkable outrage. Harold smiled to himself as he read.

Bruce Wenlock met him at the station with the dogcart.

"I have made up my mind at last," said Harold, as they drove along together.

"Made up your mind to what?"

"To propose to Elinor Trenton."

"You ought to have made up your mind long ago, as I advised you."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that you are too late in the field. James Boyd proposed to her yesterday and was accepted."

Dare sat like a man stupefied. After a long silence he said: "I thought you told me that Boyd was under a three years' engagement in South America."

"So he is. He went out as sub-engineer, but the chief engineer having died, they have given Boyd his berth. He is over in England to see about some new machinery, and I suppose he thinks that he can now afford to marry."

There was another long pause before Harold spoke again. Then he asked: "Does your father know of this arrangement?"

"Certainly he does—and approves of it. You must remember that James Boyd is the son of one of his oldest friends."

"And he will have six thousand pounds with his wife, though he doesn't know it," said Harold to himself.

His thoughts were very bitter. He loved Elinor Trenton as much as it was in his shallow, selfish nature to love anyone other than himself; and—such is human nature—now that she was lost to him he felt that she was dearer to him than she had ever been before. How he fumed at his stupidity for not having foreseen that Sir George would hardly fail to remember in his will one who had been to him almost as a child of his own, and for not having proposed to her, and run the risk of everything coming right in the end! Yes, his thoughts were very bitter.

He had time to school himself before he met her, so that she should not even suspect the wound under his armour. He greeted her with easy, smiling cordiality, and accorded her his congratulations in a few happily-turned phrases. Never had Harold Dare seemed in a gayer or merrier humour than he was that night. Bruce Wenlock looked on and wondered. Alas! for the morrow.

Next day was Christmas Eve, and the guests began to arrive by ones and twos. On account of the state of Sir George's health the gathering at the Towers this Christmas was to be a comparatively small one, being confined to relatives and the more intimate friends of the family.

Bruce and Harold were playing a game of billiards by the waning light of the afternoon, having the room to themselves, when a servant entered and stated that "a person" from London desired to see Mr. Dare on a matter of importance.

"Show him in here," said Harold, promptly. "Some messenger from the office, I suppose," he remarked to Bruce. "I hope to goodness they don't want me back before my holidays are over."

But when the "person" entered, although he was dressed in plain clothes, Harold at once recognised him as one of the two policemen who had examined his rooms after the robbery. He carried a black bag in one hand.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Dare," said the man, with that air of respectful familiarity which his class know so well how to assume when it pleases them to do so. "But perhaps you don't recollect me, sir?" he added.

"Oh, yes, I recollect you well enough," answered Harold, as he proceeded to chalk the end of his cue.

"That's all right then, sir. You will be pleased to hear that we have caught the rascal who broke into your rooms. On searching him we found a number of pawn tickets, and on going round to the various pawnbrokers, among a list of property stolen from other people, we found nearly all the articles specified in the list which you made out and gave to me. The man was up before the magistrate this morning and remanded for a week; and if you identify the articles contained in this bag as your property, you will be required to appear at Bow Street at two o'clock on Wednesday morning next to swear to that fact."

"All right," answered Harold, who had taken advantage of the break in the game to light a fresh cigar. "And now let us see what you have in the bag."

The constable opened his bag and brought out the articles it contained one by one. Each article was wrapped in a separate piece of paper which he proceeded to unfold, ranging the stolen property in a row along the table as he did so. There was the big, old-fashioned watch, there was the diamond and pearl brooch, there was the amethyst seal, together with sundry rings and other trinkets. Harold glanced his eye over the row. "Yes," said he; "they are mine, all of them, and I am prepared to swear that they were stolen from my rooms on the night of the 12th instant."

"That is all we require you to do, sir," said the officer.

Bruce Wenlock, who was standing by, took up the old watch and examined it, and then took up the amethyst seal. The afternoon was waning rapidly by this time, and he carried the seal to the window that he might have a better view of it. Neither of the others noticed the start he gave a moment or two later. Then he laid a hand on the window-sill as if to steady himself. Presently he went back to the table and laid down the seal without a word, after which he returned to the window and stood as before with his back to the room and its inmates.

A minute or two later the constable, having first been duly tipped by Harold, took his leave, carrying his bag and its contents with him.

"Shall I ring for the servant to light up?" queried Harold.

"I don't care to play any more to-day," was the response.

"You are not ill, I hope," said Harold, struck by the change in his cousin's voice.

"Not at all. By-the-bye, how did that amethyst seal come into your possession?"

Harold, who at that moment was winding up his watch, stopped in the midst of the process, as though all the pulses of his being had suddenly ceased their functions. There was utter silence while a person might have counted six slowly. Then, with an elaborate assumption of carelessness, he replied, "It came to me with a lot of other things at my father's death." With that he finished the winding up of his watch.

"The heraldic design, or whatever it may be called, that is engraved on it, is rather an uncommon one, I should imagine," said Bruce.

"It may be uncommon, or it may be common," responded the other. "It is a point that I never troubled my head about."

"Uncommon as it is, I have seen it once before," resumed Bruce; "and that not very long ago. Can you guess where it was that I saw it?" As he asked this question he turned suddenly and faced his cousin.

There was a sort of stern solemnity in his voice. His tall figure, clearly outlined against the grey disc of the window behind him, seemed to his cousin's guilty conscience to loom taller than human through the gathering gloom.

"You do not answer me," went on Bruce, after a moment's pause. "Such being the case, I will answer for you. In my father's desk is a certain envelope. That envelope, containing a draft of his will, was posted by me in your presence, on the afternoon of the 3rd of December. My father fastened it up himself, and the wax bore the impress of the only seal he ever uses. That envelope and its contents were in the mail-bag which was cut open the same night by some man who took upon himself to personate me in the transaction. When Mr. Symes brought the will to be signed and witnessed, he brought the draft and envelope with him. It was then seen that the latter had been surreptitiously opened and afterwards fastened up again. My father's seal was no longer there, but in its place was another, the impress on which was an exact counterpart of the design cut in the amethyst I held in my hand five minutes ago. Would you like to see the envelope?"

As Bruce's sentences fell slowly one by one on the ears of the wretched man standing opposite to him, the latter's face changed as it had never changed before. He cowered and shrank back a step or two, as though his cousin's words were so many blows which he had neither power nor strength to resist. He put out one hand gropingly as a blind man might have done, and his fingers coming in contact with the back of a chair, he gripped it firmly as though to keep him-

self from falling. When Bruce ceased speaking, he saw through the dusk, not the face of Harold Dare, but a white death-like mask out of which looked two eyes, full of anguish and unutterable despair.

For a few seconds the two men stood gazing at each other without a word. Then Bruce suddenly flung up his arms. "Oh, Harold! Harold!" he cried, in a voice choked with emotion, and turning, he covered his face with his hands and all the man within him was utterly broken. When he looked round, some minutes later, the door was open, and he was alone in the room.

At the end of half an hour he was still sitting there in the dark, "revolving many memories." Then one of the servants brought him a note. "From Mr. Dare, sir," said the man. Bruce went into the next room where there was a lighted lamp, and opened it. This is what he read:

"When this reaches your hands I shall have left your father's house, never to enter it again. For that of which I am guilty I have no excuse to offer beyond this, that it was done under the pressure of a temptation which you would be one of the last to understand or palliate. You, in your position, have never been assailed by such temptations, consequently they would be incomprehensible to you.

"One favour you can do me; it is the last I shall ever ask of you. My secret is yours, and yours alone: let it remain so. Facts could not be altered; no good could be done by allowing it to pass your lips. Let your father still think kindly of me; let Elinor Trenton never know me for the castaway I am.

"And now, farewell. Bruce—dear Bruce!—I shall never, never forget you! "H. D."

He was gone, and from that day forward Wenlock Towers knew him no more. Once, about a year later, the two cousins encountered each other casually in Oxford Street. Bruce stopped instinctively and held out his hand, but Harold deliberately averted his eyes and pushed on his way through the crowd, seeing and yet not willing to see.

Captain Wenlock never revealed the secret that had come so strangely into his keeping. An excuse was readily found for his cousin's abrupt departure from the Hall.

When Sir George died, two years afterwards, it was found that he had bequeathed his young kinsman a sum of eight thousand pounds. This amount was duly paid over to the legatee who, a little while later, threw up his situation under Government and quitted England with the avowed intention of settling down on a sheep farm among the far-away wilds of Australia, determined if possible by a new and honourable life to redeem the past.

THE TENDENCY OF DICKENS'S WORKS.

THE great difficulty in this essay is to know which to draw out of the many different threads that must necessarily be woven into the drapery of my subject. The works of Dickens are so many-sided in their views of life, so limitless in their portraiture of character, so teeming with artistic and poetic fancies, so glistening with bright sparks of humour, that it is hard to decide where to begin, and harder still to know where to end.

It is a relief to fall back at once on the aim which actuated the author in all he wrote, and that was—doing good to his fellow men. His aim was single, but the means by which he attained it were many and varied. We will take the broadest and most palpable.

Each of his works presents in turn a vivid picture of some great social evil, some wrong shared by many, or some individual weakness; and so correct are the outlines, so detailed and careful the filling in, so true a perspective does he give, that it is impossible for any average common sense not to detect his real meaning at once. They form an art gallery which we may wander through alone, and learn the great lessons of morality and humanity such as the Great Master, whom Charles Dickens humbly followed, loved to teach.

The first great wrong he pictured was the Workhouse System, in "Oliver Twist." Most of us know the tale. Poverty and suffering on one hand, as personified in little Oliver Twist and his wretched companions; ignorance in authority and its natural development, as seen in the matron and the beadle. And then that Board of Guardians! Many of them men with so exalted an idea of their own position, as guardians of such a philanthropic and beneficent institution, that they never noticed the wretched details of misery and wrong which they swept with their very garments.

We know that Dickens's vivid delineation of this great wrong was substantially correct at the time he drew it, and how far the present improved state of affairs is due to his pen we can only surmise.

His next book was "Nicholas Nickleby." The social evil here depicted was the cruelty and injustice secretly practised in some Yorkshire Schools, the picture of which was so lifelike that one schoolmaster wrote Dickens a threatening letter on account of the exposure. There is no doubt that the effect of this book was to do away with these schools altogether.

There are many more personal lessons to be learnt from the characters in "Nicholas Nickleby": a lesson of benevolence from the Brothers Cheeryble, who, having worked their way upwards through

great difficulties, were able to give a helpful, practical sympathy to others similarly circumstanced, as Nicholas was when he came to them—giving heartily and with pleasant words of the riches they recognised as God's gift. There is something refreshing in the simple, earnest nature of these two brothers, which had remained unspoiled by any worldly prejudice or hardening during all their years of struggle and work. It is a picture of money honestly earned and rightly held, bringing with it an adequate reward.

Ralph Nickleby, the uncle of Nicholas, and author of most of his troubles, is an instance on the other side of a man working for his wealth far harder and with far more heart-burnings than the Brothers Cheeryble; toiling for the mere gratification of getting money until it became a passion with him that warped his whole moral nature. He fed and increased the vein of meanness which he was born with until it broke and saturated his whole being—completely swamping every hope of better things. The suicide's grave where he at last rested seemed but the natural result of such a life.

The next work that appeared was "Barnaby Rudge," and, apart from the wholesome example given in the cheery, unselfish nature of Mr. Varden, the bright-faced locksmith, and the happy genial influence he brought wherever he went, it seems to me that the whole book forms one succession of pictures of the inconsistencies of human nature.

There was the solemn old landlord of the "Maypole," who had gained a reputation for the most profound depth of mind and weighty intellect, simply because his extraordinary dulness and stupidity prevented him from ever having two consecutive ideas in his head at one time—the whole country side regarding him as an oracle of wisdom who could speak if he would.

Then, further on, in that graphic account of the Gordon Riots, there was the amiable, sensitive Lord George Gordon, who could not personally have hurt an insect, and yet became the direct cause of the fiercest riot and wildest confusion. And, in the midst of all this, when Newgate was set on fire and the gates forced open, the men who clamoured loudest to be saved from the flames were the three who were doomed to be hanged on the morrow. Then Dennis, the hangman himself: who took a revolting delight in enlarging on the details of his craft, and went into ecstacies of enjoyment over the way he had worked off such numbers: when, through his treasonable connection with the plot, he was condemned to be hanged, he became the most miserable, abject wretch imaginable, begging and craving for a change in his sentence because he knew what it was.

But we will turn to some one pleasanter: and that is Dolly Varden, the pretty coquettish daughter of the locksmith, who, through pure perverseness, refused with scorn the man she really cared for, and then, when her unkindness had driven him into the army and he returned disabled and a cripple with not a shilling to bless himself

with, met him more than half way and virtually made him an offer.

Then there is Mrs. Varden, whose good spirit always rose to the surface under circumstances that crushed other people's down, and yet who invariably graced any festive occasion with tears and sighs. And surely we most of us have come across a Mrs. Varden. Or rather haven't we ourselves often felt a most unreasonable desire to grumble at something or somebody just when things have squared themselves to our entire satisfaction and we have nothing left to wish for?

The next work that appeared was "Martin Chuzzlewit," and this book seems to me, above all the rest, to be more general and more faithful in its teachings.

We can none of us deny to selfishness the precedence amongst the cardinal sins, nor dispute the fact that it invariably defeats its own ends. In old Martin Chuzzlewit we have an instance of an evil by its own strength utterly spoiling the life of one who, without it, would have been a good man. Apart from this one weak spot in his character there is nothing mean or dishonourable about him. He awakes in us no feeling of contempt, but rather one of sorrow; the sorrow we feel at the sight of beauty marred, of a good cause ruined, of great strength misplaced.

The motive-power of his life was gratification of self; and, seeing that he possessed a tolerably decent sort of self, his desires in themselves were mainly right and would have brought no evil. But the mischief lay here: he was kind-hearted enough to feel pleasure at the sight of other people's happiness, but his motive in forwarding that happiness was more his own personal gratification than their good.

His great wish was to see his ward and his nephew married, but because this good thing came about without his help, and he was robbed of the gratification of feeling that he individually had brought it about, he refused to give it his sanction. He was the cause to them of greater suffering than any amount of happiness that he might afterwards bestow could possibly atone for. Yet he really loved them both, but his own pain at witnessing their sorrow was entirely swallowed up by his selfishness. And the worst of it was, he was so blind to his fault, that it took nearly the whole of a life time to open his eyes. It was only the sight of his sins exaggerated in another—seeing himself as others saw him, only rather more so—that at length restored his moral vision.

The nephew himself, young Martin, presents an exactly similar instance of a good man spoiled, and he was cured by seeing the unselfishness of his servant, Mark Tapley.

I need not ask whether these pictures are true to life. We some of us may know from ourselves, and all of us from people we have come across, that this respectable selfishness does exist; that it often

has no idea of its own name; that it is very quick to detect itself in others, and to feel true contempt for itself; that nothing so soon rouses its real admiration as the sight of a man without it; and that, when those of us who may claim it do get a view of our own wrong, it often works in us a repentance that needs no repenting of, as in the case of the two Chuzzlewits.

And now I must just touch on one more character before I leave this book, and that is Tom Pinch, the man who must have come so near the heart of Dickens, for we feel its generous, healthy pulses as we read. Who besides Dickens could or would have drawn such a hero as Tom Pinch? A man with no rare mental gifts, no personal beauty, no favourite of fortune, and yet a man around whom our best thoughts love to linger even though they call up self-reproach. A man whose greatness simply meant his goodness. A hero in the sense of one who ruleth his spirit rather than one who taketh a city. Single-heartedness, unselfishness, steadfastness of purpose place Tom Pinch on as high a moral platform as any hero of fiction; and yet so great was the simplicity of words and manners which accompanied these gifts, so ordinary and unremarkable the circumstances which developed them, that we are unavoidably led to see how perfectly natural such Christian graces might become to our own every-day life.

The next book was "Dombey and Son," and the leading passion here portrayed is pride.

Mr. Dombey is a stern, hard man, immovable and impenetrable as some dark, towering, granite rock, impervious to all outside influences, except such as touched his pride; pride of his wealth, his position, his family name, and all these things centred in his little motherless son, Paul, who was to perpetuate the great name of Dombey. All the care that wealth and thought could procure was lavished on the boy in his infancy. Then, before he had quite left that period, his intellect was taken in hand to be developed and expanded when it had as yet barely shown itself, and, of course, the natural consequence followed. The frail little sapling of the great Dombey tree drooped and died; the proud man had to bow his will to God's over-ruling power; and the idol at whose shrine he had sacrificed all the higher and better capabilities of his soul was brought to the ground. It was only after many long years of bitterness and obstinacy of spirit that he was at length brought to the knowledge that his extremity had been God's opportunity of doing him good and not evil.

We will pass over "David Copperfield," which contains so much of the author's personal experience, and just touch on "Little Dorrit."

The name gives you the key-note of the book. It is one long sermon on the beauty of unselfishness, practically shown in the life of the heroine. It is by no means one of his best books, and yet Dickens seems to me to have draped "Little Dorrit" in his most beautiful gar-

ment, and to have lingered lovingly over his work, giving perfect touches here and there.

Her intense and oftenest unappreciated love for her father; the tender veil with which she covered all his weakness and his wrong, even from herself when possible; the way in which her whole thought and happiness were wrapped up in the lives of others; the heroism of which her keenly sensitive soul was capable when the interests of those she loved were at stake: all these things seem at first to make Little Dorrit more a grand impossibility than a living reality. Such pure unselfishness could hardly have existed in an atmosphere of mere morality; but Dickens gives us one glimpse of a higher than a moral power in her life which precludes impossibilities.

The other books of Dickens must be passed over with a bare mention. There is "Bleak House," with its warnings against Chancery, and its telling examples of this great evil, most of them taken from life. "Hard Times," showing the miserable consequences of educating the head and neglecting to improve the heart. Then there were the different "Christmas Tales," which carried their messages of goodwill towards men to so many hearths, warming the hearts of the readers with such true Christmas cheer.

I have been wondering what little bit out of all these books I should give you, to show how simply and naturally Dickens brings us face to face with his characters, and makes us understand and sympathise with their joys and griefs however far apart their circumstances and our own may be.

There is the end of old Betty Higden, the poor, proud, independent-spirited old woman, whose life-long horror had been the parish, or parish help in any form, and who at last was pursued even to death by this same phantom. The following extract is taken from the end of her hard life. The money which is to pay for her burial is stitched in her dress, and her one great hope is to wander on alone until death has for ever closed all workhouses against her.

"Old Betty Higden fared upon her pilgrimage as many ruggedly honest creatures, women and men, fare on their toiling way along the roads of life. Patiently to earn a spare bare living, and quietly to die untouched by workhouse hands—this was her highest sublunary hope.

"The weather had been hard, and the roads had been bad, and her spirit was up. Faithful soul! When she had spoken to the secretary of 'that deadness that steals over me at times,' her fortitude had made too little of it. Oftener, and ever oftener, it came stealing over her; darker, and ever darker, like the shadow of advancing death. That the shadow should be deep as it came on, like the shadow of an actual presence, was in accordance with the laws of the physical world, for all the light that shone on Betty Higden lay beyond death.

"The poor old creature had taken the upward course of the River Thames as her general track; it was the track in which her last home lay, and of which she last had local love and knowledge. She had sold, and knitted and sold, and gone on.

"In the pleasant towns about, her figure came to be quite well known for some short weeks, and then again passed on. But the old abhorrence grew stronger on her as she grew weaker, and it found more sustaining food than she did in her wanderings.

"Sometimes she would light upon a poor, decent person, like herself, going afoot on a pilgrimage of many weary miles to see some worn-out relative or friend who had been charitably clutched off to a great, blank, barren Union House, far from the old home. Sometimes she would hear read out of a newspaper, how the Registrar-General cast up the units that had within the last week died of want and exposure to the weather, for which that recording angel seemed to have a regular fixed place in his sum, as if they were its halfpence.

"All such things she would hear discussed, and from all such things she would fly with the wings of raging despair. This is not to be received as a figure of speech. Old Betty Higden, however tired, however footsore, would start up and be driven away by her awakened horror of falling into the hands of charity.

"It is a remarkable Christian improvement to have made a pursuing fury of the good Samaritan, but it was so in this case, and it is a type of many."

Two incidents united to intensify the old unreasoning abhorrence: these I must condense. The dead faintness came over her in a market-place, and when consciousness returned some women were supporting her. She was too weak to stand, until some man in the crowd proposed the Union, and then her fading energies came back and she would press on. Then again, at the side of a canal the deadness returned, and when she was recovered she left her few loose coins with the man in the lock-house to pay him for not delivering her over to the authorities.

Now to go on with the text.

"She was gone out of the lock-house as soon as he gave her permission, and her tottering steps were on the road again. But, afraid to go back and afraid to go forward, she struck off by side ways among which she got bewildered and lost. That night she took refuge from the Samaritan, in his latest accredited form, under a farmer's rick. The morning found her afoot again, but fast declining as to the clearness of her thoughts, though not as to the steadiness of her purpose. Comprehending that her strength was quitting her, and that the struggle of her life was almost ended, she could neither reason out the means of getting back to her protectors, nor even form the idea.

"The overmastering dread, and the proud stubborn resolution it engendered in her to die undegraded, were the two distinct impressions left in her failing mind. Supported only by a sense that she was bent on conquering in her life-long fight, she went o

"The time was come, now, when the wants of this little life were passing from her. She could not have swallowed food, though a table had been spread for her in the next field. The day was cold and wet, but she scarcely knew it. She crept on, poor soul, like a criminal afraid of being taken, and felt little beyond the terror of falling down while it was yet daylight, and being found alive. She had no fear that she would live through another night. Sewn in the breast of her gown, the money to pay for her burial was still intact. If she could wear through the day, and then lie down to die under cover of the darkness, she

would die independent. If she were captured previously the money would be taken from her. As a pauper she had no right to it, and she would be carried to the workhouse. So, keeping to by-ways, and shunning human approach, this troublesome old woman hid herself, and fared on all through the dreary day.

"Yet so unlike was she to vagrant hiders in general, that sometimes, as the day advanced, there was a bright fire in her eyes, and a quicker beating at her feeble heart, as though she said exultingly, 'The Lord will see me through it.' Faring on and hiding, hiding and faring on, the poor harmless creature, as though she were a murderess and the whole country were up after her, wore out the day and gained the night. 'Water, meadows, and such like,' she had sometimes murmured in the day's pilgrimage, when she had raised her head and taken note of the real objects about her.

"There now arose in the darkness a great building, full of lighted windows. Between her and the building lay a piece of water in which the lighted windows were reflected, and on its nearest margin was a plantation of trees. 'I humbly thank the Power and the Glory,' said Betty Higden, holding up her withered hands, 'that I have come to my journey's end.' She crept among the trees to the trunk of a tree, whence she could see beyond some intervening trees and branches the lighted windows. She placed her orderly little basket at her side, and sank upon the ground, supporting herself against the tree. It brought to her mind the foot of the Cross, and she committed herself to Him who died upon it.

"Her strength held out to enable her to arrange the letter in her breast, so that it could be seen that she had a paper there. It had held out for this, and it departed when this was done. 'I am safe here,' was her last benumbed thought. 'When I am found dead at the foot of the Cross, it will be by some of my own sort; some of the workpeople who work among the lights yonder. I cannot see the lighted windows now, but they are there. I am thankful for all.' . . . . The darkness gone, and a face bending down. It is as the face of a woman shaded by a quantity of rich dark hair. It is the earnest face of a woman who is young and handsome. But all is over with her on earth, and this must be an angel. 'Have I been long dead?'

"'I don't understand what you say. Let me wet your lips again.'

'Am I not dead?'

"'I cannot understand what you say. Your voice is so low and broken that I cannot hear you. Do you hear me?'

"'Yes.'

"'Do you mean yes?'

"'Yes.'

"'I was coming from my work just now, along the path outside, and I heard a groan, and found you lying here.'

"'What work, deary?'

"'Did you ask what work? At the paper-mill.'

"'Where is it?'

"'Your face is turned up to the sky, and you can't see it. Dare I lift you?'

"'Not yet.'

"'Not even lift your head to get it on my arm? I will do it by very gentle degrees. You shall hardly feel it.'

"'Not yet. The paper. The letter.'

"'This paper in your breast?'

"'Bless ye!'

"'Let me wet your lips again. Am I to open it? To read it?'

"'Bless ye!'

"She reads it with surprise, and looks down with a new expression and an

added interest on the motionless face she kneels beside. 'I know these names. I have heard them often.'

"'Will you send it, my dear?'

"'I cannot understand you. Let me wet your lips again and your forehead. There. Oh, poor thing, poor thing!'

"These words through her fast-dropping tears. 'What was it that you asked me? Wait till I bring my ear quite close.'

"'Will you send it, my dear?'

"'Will I send it to the writers? Is that your wish? Yes, certainly.'

"'You'll not give it up to anyone but them?'

"'No.'

"'As you must grow old in time, and come to your dying hour, my dear, you'll not give it up to anyone but them?'

"'No, most solemnly.'

"'Never to the parish!' with a convulsed struggle.

"'No, most solemnly.'

"'Nor let the parish touch me, nor yet so much as look at me!' with another struggle.

"'No, faithfully.'

"A look of thankfulness and triumph lights the worn old face. The eyes which have been darkly fixed upon the sky turn with meaning in them towards the compassionate face from which the tears are dropping, and a smile is on the aged lips as they ask:

"'What is your name, my dear?'

"'My name is Lizzie Hexam.'

"'I must be sore disfigured. Are you afraid to kiss me?'

"The answer is the ready pressure of her lips upon the cold but smiling mouth.

"Bless ye! *Now* lift me, my love.'

"Lizzie Hexam very slowly raised the weather-stained, grey head, and lifted her as high as Heaven."

There are many other good points in Dickens's writings which might be enlarged upon, such as their purity and healthy-mindedness, the invariable triumph of good over evil, but I should like to touch upon one or two general objections which have been made to them. First their seeming exaggeration.

Now this exaggeration does not lie in his artistic fancies; his descriptive pieces are true and lifelike as any painted picture. It doesn't lie in his broad effects. We cannot feel—looking at his books as a whole—that the great wrongs, with their influences, which he delineated, have been exaggerated. It is when he comes to individual sketches that the fault is found. We have, as I said before, correct outlines, faultless perspective, with sometimes, what at first looks like deep and rather extra colouring. But I think it is a question as to whether these pictures would have caught the eye of the nation and held it, as they did, if the colours had been toned down and etherealised-off into a hazy mysticism. There are very few nations whose reading class, taken as a whole, would comprise a literary majority. Dickens was essentially a writer for the people:

for that class of whose cause he was the lifelong advocate : and though the intellectual triumphs of his works won for him many laurels from the higher classes, yet he never arranged his plots or moulded his characters to impress a noble fancy or beguile an aristocratic leisure. He wrote for the child-mind of the nation ; and as in children's picture-books the lamb must have a great deal of wool and the fox a very long tail to convince them at once this is a lamb and that is a fox, so Mr. Pecksniff was made the impersonation of nothing but meanness and selfishness, Harold Skimpole was an utter drone, and Jonas Chuzzlewit had no redeeming feature.

I have tried to say this as a reason for what is generally accepted as exaggeration in Dickens. I myself do not see much which deserves that name. The next objection, and one I cannot altogether answer, is Dickens's graphic sketches of religious hypocrisy. His Chadband and Stiggins have touched not only the susceptible self-righteousness of men with whom they might very distantly have shaken hands, but the better feelings of others, who think that something like mockery was intended of what they justly hold in deepest reverence. No one can for a moment believe that Charles Dickens ever intended to be irreverent, or had the remotest thought of casting the shadow of a slur on the religion which actuated him all through life, and wholly possessed him during the later years. He hated, with a whole-souled, righteous hatred, hypocrisy in any form in connection with anything ; and the more injurious he thought its effect the greater was his abhorrence of it, the more vivid his delineation, the more extreme his caricature.

I think the following letter, written to his son when he was leaving for Australia, will give a true idea of his feeling on this subject :

" I write this note to-day because your going away is much upon my mind, and because I want you to have a few parting words from me to think of now and then at quiet times. I need not tell you that I love you dearly, and am very sorry in my heart to part with you. But this life is half made up of partings, and these pains must be borne. It is my comfort and sincere conviction that you are going to try the life for which you are best fitted. What you have always wanted until now has been a set, steady, constant purpose. I therefore exhort you to persevere in a thorough determination to do whatever you have to do as well as you can do it. Never take a mean advantage of anyone in any transaction, and never be hard upon people who are in your power. Try and do to others as you would have them do to you, and do not be discouraged if they fail sometimes. It is much better for you that they should fail in obeying the greatest rules laid down by our Saviour than that you should. I put a New Testament among your books for the very same reasons, and with the very same hopes, that made me write an easy account of it for you when you were a little child ; because it is the best book that ever was or will be known in the world, and because it teaches you the best

lessons by which any human creature, who tries to be truthful and faithful to duty, can possibly be guided. As your brothers have gone away, one by one, I have written to each such words as I am now writing to you, and have entreated them all to guide themselves by this book, putting aside the interpretations and inventions of men. You will remember that at home you have never been harrassed about religious observances or mere formalities. I have always been anxious not to weary my children with such things before they are old enough to form opinions respecting them. You will, therefore, understand the better that I now most solemnly impress upon you the truth and beauty of the Christian religion as it came from Christ Himself, and the impossibility of your going far wrong if you humbly and heartily respect it.

"Only one thing more on this head.

"The more we are in earnest as to feeling it, the less we are disposed to hold forth about it. Never abandon the wholesome practice of saying your own private prayers, night and morning. I have never abandoned it myself, and I know the comfort of it."

They who most intimately knew Dickens say that every word there is written from his heart, and is radiant with the truth of his nature.

Again, in answer to a letter from a clergyman, he says: "I beg to thank you for your letter. There cannot be many men, I believe, who have a more humble veneration for the New Testament, or a more profound conviction of its all-sufficiency, than I have. If I am ever (as you tell me I am) mistaken on this subject, it is because I discountenance all obtrusive professions of, and tradings in, religion, as one of the main causes why real Christianity has been retarded in this world, and because my observation of life induces me to hold in unspeakable dread and horror those unseemly squabbles about the *letter* which drive the spirit out of hundreds of thousands." Then again, when a reader of "Edwin Drood" had accused him of irreverently quoting a line of Scripture, he says, denying the charge: "I am truly shocked that any reader could make the mistake. I have always striven in my writings to express veneration for the life and lessons of our Saviour, because I feel it. But I have never made proclamation of this from the housetops." At the end of his last will and testament he says: "I commit my soul to the mercy of God, through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and I exhort my dear children humbly to try to guide themselves by the teachings of the New Testament in its broad spirit, and to put no faith in any man's narrow construction of its letter here and there."

Now all this, though it may not have proved Dickens to have thought as the majority here may think, must prove him to be actuated by good and pure motives. In conclusion I will give the words of Dean Stanley, spoken after Dickens's death, in Westminster Abbey. "He whom we mourn was the friend of mankind, a philanthropist in the true sense, the friend of youth, the friend of the poor, the enem y o

every form of meanness and oppression. I am not going to attempt to draw a portrait of him. Men of genius are different from what we suppose them to be. They have greater pleasures and pains, greater affections and greater temptations than the generality of mankind, and they can never be altogether understood by their fellow-men. But we feel that a light has gone out, and the world is dark to us, when they depart. He whose loss we now mourn occupied a greater space than any other writer in the minds of Englishmen during the last thirty-three years. We read him, talked about him, acted him, we laughed with him, we were roused by him to a consciousness of the misery of others, and to a pathetic interest in human life. Works of fiction, indirectly, are the great instructors of this world; and we can hardly exaggerate the debt of gratitude which is due to a writer who has led us to sympathise with those good, true, sincere, honest English characters of ordinary life, and to laugh at the egotism, the hypocrisy, the false respectability of religious professors and others. To another great humourist who lies in this church the words have been applied, that his death eclipsed the gaiety of nations. But of him who has recently been taken, I would rather say that no one was ever so much beloved or so much mourned." A. D.

SONNET.

Oh thou to whom it hath been giv'n to know
All things which chiefly long'd to know the wise,
Who know'st of Love far more than mothers' eyes
Revealed to us in childhood long ago,
Say! what is that which we call Life below,
Which fades as clouds fade from the summer skies,
The while we wonder what beyond them lies?
And is that Joy for which we struggle so?
Thou, who no more requirest ears to hear,
Nor eyes to see, nor tongue to speak, oh, say
How went it with thee? Was the journey drear?
And were there tracks to guide thee on thy way
To Wisdom? Tell us: art thou far or near,
Thou little child who diedst yesterday?

Lena Milman.

SABRINA.

I.

ON a July evening, when the last flush of rose-colour had passed away and left a still opaline clearness above the horizon, two friends sat on a rough seat beneath a group of lime trees.

They were not lovers; far from it; yet Patience Fothergil and John Burton had been lovers in a dead and buried past, and the Patience, sitting there with silver threads in her hair and a few wrinkles about eyes and mouth, was no more like the bright-haired, blossom-faced girl of twenty years ago, than was the anxious-looking, hard-featured solicitor, to the eager youth, in whose blue eyes hope had shone clear, as he faced the world, soul and body erect. His head was bowed thoughtfully enough now, and care had bent him towards the earth.

I, Patience, had not blamed him in the after years; nay, perhaps had learned to be glad of it; but I must confess that, at the time, it hurt me sorely when John told me that I was too strong-minded for him, that his ideal was now a soft, feminine woman, glad to lean meekly on her husband, and without thought beyond her home. Then he quoted some dreadful lines from Milton. We had been quarrelling, and I said:

"That will do, John; our lives lie apart from this moment."

He was startled; had not supposed me so ready to take him at his word; perhaps had thought to pare me down to his ideal, save the mark! But no entreaties could bring us together again; that speech of his had killed my love for him as effectually as if he had given me a blow.

My cousin Margery is his wife now—soft and feminine, and undecided as Milton's Eve, and as aggravating as that lady must have been when she reached middle age. I am sorry to say that her eight boys have much more of Cain than of Abel in their composition. Their father is much from home and their mother is weak; therefore they are much more obnoxious than men in miniature generally are. I do not say it gladly, I only state a fact.

When Margery came to me, six months after John and I had parted, and told me, blushing and smiling, that she was engaged to him, I congratulated her most sincerely.

We had kept up a constant correspondence after their marriage and departure for Trinidad, where John had an appointment; but we had never met again till this summer, when John had settled down near Shrubton, and bought a pretty house with nine or ten acres of ground, including the walled garden in which we were sitting, with no more romance in either of us than there was in the green peaches and apricots nailed to the south wall.

"So you return to Paris at the end of next month, Patience? I wish I could persuade you to remain with us."

I thought of my young cousins and stifled that hope promptly, not having the smallest rudiment of missionary feeling towards those young savages.

"No, thank you, John. My income is small, as you know, and I eke it out by giving lessons."

"But we could arrange about that. The boys are sadly in want of a firm hand over them, and I am so much from home."

As he spoke a series of wild whoops filled the air, and six boys of various sizes rushed into the garden, dragging with them a young girl. They were now talking at the highest pitch of their by no means musical voices, and that was a very lofty altitude indeed. "Now, then, will you tell us what Cousin Miles was saying to you? You *shall* tell us, you know——" This from a tall lad of fourteen.

"Yes, indeed! Nurse says you are nothing but a dependent," shrieked a small boy in knickerbockers; and so on, *ad libitum*. I could hear no reply from the girl, the uproar was too great.

"You have my final answer, John," I said. "Your dear boys are too much for my nerves."

"So they are for Margery's."

I should perhaps have spoken somewhat unwisely as to the necessity of reclining upon the couches we arrange for ourselves, but John sprang up and went towards the unruly crew, which fled at his approach like a covey of partridges. He did not return, and I could hear his voice in the house issuing orders that every boy should go to bed at once.

The girl, left alone in the gathering darkness, came slowly along the path between the roses and seringa bushes. She was sobbing with a weary, half-exhausted sound, like a child. I sat quite still, holding my breath till she came close to me; then I called her.

"Sabrina!"

She started violently. "Nervous," I said to myself. "I wish to speak to you, my dear," I added aloud.

She sat down beside me, silent for a while, tapping her foot restlessly on a clump of hen and chicken daisies: then she spoke.

"You heard those boys, Miss Fothergil? It is so hard to be patient!"

"Yes, my dear. But who is Cousin Miles?"

I could not see her face in the darkness, but she answered in a steady voice: "A distant cousin of Mamma's and Uncle John's. He was so good to us when she was dying; and we were so poor before Uncle John returned. He has just come here now."

I had guessed a love affair, but she spoke so simply that I changed my idea at once; of course he was an elderly cousin.

"Those boys ought not to behave so," I said.

"You are Aunt Margery's cousin, and I will not say any more

about them," returned Sabrina. "I should say too much perhaps, for I have eaten the apple that 'True Thomas' refused, I think," with an unsteady little laugh.

I will here confess that I had fallen in love, on the farther side of middle age, not with any masculine person, but with Sabrina Grace. I shall never forget the first time I saw her. I was reading Mrs. Browning's poem, 'Caterina to Camœns,' when Margery brought her to my room; I had not seen her before, for she had been away on a visit. I lifted my head from the line, 'sweetest eyes were ever seen,' and contradicted Mrs. Browning mentally as I looked into those before me; grey, centering into black, essence of sunlight and moonlight and all things ethereal. I loved them from that moment. Yes, she was lovely in spite of her sunburnt face; not with a regular loveliness, but with something beautifully imperfect.

It vexed me to see her worried by the boys, to hear their rude jests and taunts, and I thought out a plan which I now proposed to her: that she should come and live with me in Paris, and give lessons. She was delighted, for she was fond of me.

"Do you really mean it? Oh, how nice," and she clapped her hands. There was something childish about Sabrina, which I did not dislike.

"Think well before you decide," I said. "It is a hard life. You must be out early and late, in all weathers."

"But I am strong," she said. Then in a changed voice: "Aunt Margery will not like it."

I knew that, but I promised to settle it with John.

By this time the tide of darkness was full and the stars were scattered over the sky; so we walked slowly towards the house, a model on a small scale of an English country house, with its smooth lawn, from which the buttercups and daisies had been ruthlessly banished. It sloped down to a dimpling brook, which flowed with a hushed purr in the darkness. I thought of the waters of Shiloah, that go softly. Such meditations—indeed any meditations—were impossible during the day in that neighbourhood: for did not crooked pins dance in its waters, and dirt pies soil its clearness from morn till eve, while a troop of urchins sported like juvenile Satyrs on its brink?

The water slid along, and my thoughts flowed on through the years to come, wherein the girl by my side should be as a daughter to me, playing Ruth to my Naomi, with no interrupting Boaz, I hoped.

Margery's voice cleft the silence like the thin edge of a wedge. "Patience, where are you? Oh, here you are! Will you come in to supper. Oh! Sabrina, I didn't see you"—this in a tone of extreme displeasure. "What were the dear boys doing that their papa should send them to bed?" she added.

I replied: "Your dear boys were behaving like savages, Margery.

If they could feel the rein and the rod a little oftener, some lives might be more peaceful!" Which outburst on my part might be rude, but was not unprovoked. My cousin burst into tears. How some women weep! It is like the wringing of a wet knitted garment; the dropping seems endless.

"I am sure," she said between little gasps: for she is cushiony, as if she had swallowed gallons of feathers: "I am sure," she said, "it is very painful to think that all our relations have a prejudice against the boys. Better boys never existed. Even Sabrina is against them, and I thought she would be such a help to me. They only want gentleness."

I thought of a scene I had witnessed only that morning in the schoolroom. Sabrina was sitting at a table trying to keep from crying, but with scarlet cheeks and quivering lips, holding down a boy on each side. At a smaller table a couple more had spilt the ink; a third pair had brought in a paper box of butterflies, and were busy practising vivisection. The last set of boys were still in the chrysalis stage of nursery life, or doubtless they would have added their quota to the general misbehaviour.

In the midst of the din, Margery looked in. "Can't you manage with less noise, Sabrina?—No, I will not have them complained of," and she closed the door and went down to the quiet, flower-scented drawing-room to finish a sofa rug in soft wools.

I had heard all this, and I came in from my room and boxed their ears all round, at the same time giving them my opinion of their conduct.

I thought, I say, of this scene, and sooner than I should otherwise have done, I spoke my wish. "This child is looking ill; let her come to Paris with me. I will give her food and house-room, and lessons to provide for the rest."

"But John will not like his niece to give lessons."

"In the name of goodness what is she doing in this house? Those boys are wearing her out, body and soul."

"But what shall I do with the boys?"

I could have shaken the selfish little woman.

"Send Jack, Bob, and Harry to school, and get a governess with some authority about her to teach the others."

"Cousin Miles must be consulted," she said, as we went in together.

Sabrina had slipped away at the beginning of our conversation. We had dined early, and supper was laid in the dining-room, the hangings and furniture of which were of a warm brown. The table was pretty enough with its white drapery, its lamps and flowers, and heaps of strawberries and cherries on green leaves, spiritualising, as it were, the grosser parts of the feast. Margery has good taste; I will say that in her favour.

Leaning against the window at the farther end of the room was a young man, who turned as we entered.

"This is Cousin Miles," said Margery, by way of introduction; and my heart sank. They have a bad habit in that family of alluding to unknown persons as if others knew all about them; so I had been picturing to myself a relative—rich, elderly, and rotund—who took a fatherly interest in Sabrina. The reality was a man of not more than seven-and-twenty, light-haired, yet with glowing black eyes, that seemed to penetrate the thoughts of the person they looked at. He was clean shaven, except for a heavy moustache; there was a faint tinge of Bohemianism about him, though he was quietly dressed in grey, like any other gentleman. He was an artist, and perhaps that accounted for it.

Shrubton has some fine scenery in its neighbourhood, and our young artist had come to feed his growing fame by closer communion with nature. He had taken lodgings in the town, so he was free to come and go as he liked.

He did not talk much at first, nor did we. The stillness was growing dreamy, when Miles spoke.

"Well, Sabrina, will you sit to me?"

He was evidently repeating a former request. She looked towards Margery, who frowned.

"I will see what John says" (John had gone out), "but I thought you came to paint from nature."

"Just so; and here I find the best piece of nature for my purpose."

He was too much in earnest to mean a compliment.

"You would not mind, Sabrina?" and he turned to her with a smile.

"Of course you may paint her, Miles, after all your kindness—only there are the dear children's lessons."'

He blushed and looked annoyed as he rose to go, but only remarked: "Then, Sabrina, we shall begin to-morrow morning, if that will suit you."

"Oh yes, Miles," she replied eagerly.

"That's a dear girl," he said heartily. "John is sure to say yes." And bidding us good-night, he went, meditating on his picture without a thought as to the personality of his model, to my great relief. Perhaps it was selfish, but I did so want Sabrina.

II.

Miles came and went. He had been allowed the use of a large garret, and thither, when the spiders, who had lived in that gloomy domain till they thought it their own, had been expelled, he brought his easel and improvised a platform for his model. The windows were arranged for the light, and near one of them I sat and made pretence to work; not that they needed looking after, but I liked to watch the picture and Sabrina. The subject was Dante Rossetti's "Blessed Damosel."

Sabrina stood on a platform, dressed in a long, straight robe of some shimmering white stuff, which Miles had given her; her long hair was loose over her shoulders.

She looked the poem, for she felt it, and the meaning grew upon her till once or twice her tears fell.

"Beautiful," cried Miles. "Sabrina, fancy yourself on the verge of heaven, and myself the fellow you are grieving for."

In his enthusiasm he sometimes forgot that his model was mortal. I told him so one day.

"Poor little girl," said he, penitently; "do tell me when you are tired." But she never did: indeed she assured me that the garret was a haven of rest after "those boys."

One morning I looked up from my work and caught an expression on her face which startled me. She was looking at the painter with a tender yearning in her eyes and lovely sorrowful lines round her mouth. Of this she was profoundly unconscious; so was he. A fragrance filled the gloom of the quiet place; it came from the lilies on her arm. She had gathered them early, with the dew on them.

At noon we paused and came down from artistic heights to luncheon, which had been brought to us at my request. The rapt look passed from Sabrina's face. The artist saw the change, but the man did not perceive the cause.

"What a splendid actress you would make, Sabrina," said he, eyeing her critically.

"What do you mean, Miles?"

"You transform yourself so completely! You will make me famous."

She never thought that it would be her face and form that the world would gaze at; nor did he, for he lived but for his art, a goddess austere to so many, but to him kind as Dian to Endymion. As for Sabrina—well, it is no new thing; the skiff of her soul was anchored against a shore dangerous but beautiful, in a land where "it seems always afternoon," so mellow is the light, so soft the air.

Sabrina was not yet fully grown to her womanhood, and perhaps it was just as well that Miles did not notice that he had disturbed the balance of her nature. So a veil hung between them: and I longed for the picture to be finished lest it should be torn away.

I thought once that the revelation had come. Margery had gone on a round of calls with John, and the picture being well on, we had taken a holiday and stolen out through the fields, where the great ox-eye daisies flung themselves against our knees, and so on to the river into which the brook flowed. Here we found a bower formed by trails of ivy, that hung like a curtain between wild cherry trees.

The boys had happily been occupied with a rat hunt in the stables, so we were alone. Miles read us "The Stream's Secret." We read a good deal of Rossetti just then.

I was sorry he chose that, for it was a voice to articulate what was to her as vague as the music of the reed before Pan blew into it.

"The very ways where now we walk apart."

He paused. Sabrina was looking into the river with wistful eyes and lips covered with her hand; her breath deepened into a sigh. I hoped Miles would not look at her. If only——a shower of leaves descended with a chorus of elfish laughter.

"Here we are again! Stolen a march on you. Ha, ha!"

Three of the boys had run on before us and hidden themselves in the trees. Miles sprang up and sent them away; they went grumbling, and we were once more at peace. But the spell was broken; we read no more, but talked instead; at least, Miles and I did. For the first, and as yet for the last time, I was glad to see and hear those boys.

III.

The picture, the bright summer weather, the cool gloom of our garret, the white lilies, John, Margery, and those boys, even Miles, had faded into the background: for the fresh September days had brought Sabrina and myself to my doll's apartment in Paris.

There are thousands of such tiny nests scattered through Paris, where newly-married couples, old maids and widows, may live and even sweeten life with many small pleasures.

My house consisted of three rooms and a very small kitchen; a kitchen in the bud, as it were, for it was a tight fit for two slender persons.

The three rooms opened into each other, the one in the centre being our sitting-room. This latter I had made into a gem of prettiness, for I could afford some small luxuries. The carpet was soft and green, to imitate moss; the sofa and chairs were easy, meet for tired limbs; the curtains were green, with a tracery of red-brown vine-leaves to match the walls. In the window was a stand of wild ferns, with a scarlet geranium in the midst, which filled the eye like a flame amid the quietness of its surroundings. A wire basket hung above this, filled with smaller ferns and long trails of ivy, which were reflected in the mirror opposite.

In the bedrooms we had Indian matting and soft rugs; there were silk "edredons" on the beds, and writing tables with a plant on each.

One half of the kitchen was filled by a tiled fireplace, in whose square holes we were adepts at lighting charcoal fires. We had a "femme de ménage" who was supposed to come and prepare our meals, but woe to the person who puts faith in a "femme de ménage." So we often put on gloves and lighted our charcoal for our café-au-lait. Our good concierge (an exception to the rule) would often bring our dinner from a neighbouring restaurant.

It was not always pleasant weather, and in the depth of winter we often came home damp and tired. But there was the evening, with its cosy meal, and the lounge by the sparkling wood fire heaped on the hearth between the dogs; the black coffee, best modern substitute for nectar, the last Tauchnitz volume, and the talk which often lasted into the small hours.

Sometimes we went to the theatre; sometimes we had little receptions, mostly of women, when we tried to keep the talk from getting narrow by mixing it with music and games.

For a time I was perfectly happy, for Sabrina was joyous; but it was only for a time.

When the spring came she began to droop, and the doctor ordered change for both of us. So we put our lessons aside for a while and went to Braie, a tiny village near St. Germain, pleasantly embowered in apple and pear trees.

Our lodging was in a farm-house, whence we could look down the green aisles of the forest. On fine days we sat on the mossy carpet beneath the trees, looking up through the swaying branches to a heaven whose blue was subdued by little white clouds. But one April day dawned when the ground was covered with snow and the trees shivered in the icy wind.

Before this Sabrina had been brighter and stronger; but on this desolate day she resumed her mental solitude and took to reading Thomas à Kempis. In answer to my remonstrances she remarked: "I love no one now, not even you, dear; my heart is dead; only duty remains; that must be enough for me."

"Your duty is to get well and amuse yourself," I retorted, glancing at the pile of really good novels, some of which had brought smiles to her lips during the past days.

"Oh! those books are frivolous," said she. "Let me read you some of this, Miss Patience."

I assented, and she read on till she came to the eighth chapter: "'Converse not much with young people and strangers . . . . Be not familiar with any woman, but in a general way commend all good women to God.'"

I became cross. "What can one expect from an old monk but that he should despise women? Depend upon it, my dear, it is best for men and women to meet, aye, and love each other. Take it for all in all, marriage is the noblest life, if you meet with the right person. Of course all hangs upon that *if!* I think it was better for Adam to fall with Eve, than to live on in Eden a hermit."

"But is not renunciation always right?"

"For those who have a superfluity of anything to renounce. Now put away your very good book till you have done your share in renouncing the world, the flesh, and the devil, having bravely fought them all."

Was it my speech which had brought life and colour to Sabrina's

face, as Thomas à Kempis slipped from her lap and she passed from a nun into a woman?

IV.

I LOOKED round involuntarily, and in the doorway stood Miles, with a mischievous smile on his sunburnt face. How very welcome he was, to be sure!

"Having fought them all," he repeated. "Now, I wonder who they can be? Ah! I know: Margery's naughty boys."

"No, I said, half vexed; "the world, the flesh, and the devil—more terrible opponents even than those naughty boys."

He laughed, and Sabrina, with her hand lingering in his, laughed too.

I looked out of the window. One of those sudden changes which take place in April had come over the weather; the greyness had passed into a mellow afternoon tint, a warm wind was melting the snow. Within, they two stood, with the air of people awakening from a dream.

"Sabrina, sit down. She has been ill, Mr. Grace. Didn't Margery tell you? She has corresponded with you, I know." Sabrina's face had lost its glow and grown pale again.

"No; Margery said nothing about it. What has been the matter?" said he, softly leaning towards her.

"Only weakness, but it is nearly over now," with a long breath, as of one laying down a burden.

Miles stayed, talking of the winter. We did not know that he had spent it in Egypt, at which he seemed vexed. We walked back part of the way to St. Germain with him, and in the middle of the long chestnut avenue, facing the château, we said goodbye. I shook hands with him and turned to go, but they lingered.

Sabrina had in her hand a few violets, and he asked her for them. There are a few faults without which a woman cannot well get on; one of these is coquetry. At this period Sabrina was absolutely lacking in it. The stupid girl actually never caught the look with which he made his request, though I do not believe she saw the violets very distinctly. I perceived all this, however, out of the corner of my eye.

"These?" said she; "they are not very fresh; I have been holding them in my hand; but you may have them if you like," and she put a few leaves with them.

As she gave them to him, he touched her hands with his lips, then with a look of pain I could not understand, he walked rapidly away. Sabrina fell into a fit of musing, as she walked beside me. She was again standing by that mysterious stream, whose ripples touched her very feet. For some days after this I sat and watched her icy sweetness expand into that warm and fragrant blossom which we call by so many names. We read and we talked, but never once of Miles; he was too near our thoughts for that.

He did not come to see us for a good while, and I, at least, was disappointed. There is nothing specially attractive to a young man in the society of an elderly female, so there might be no special inducement in me; but he might have come, I thought, to see the rare beauty that he had evoked in my young companion.

His absence told upon Sabrina. Elaine, you will remember, died because Launcelot had no heart to give her in return for hers; but this girl, instead of dying, would become morose and ascetic, if her heart were left empty. I saw it every hour. She was constantly saying little sharp things to me, then begging my pardon.

On the sixth evening of this she sat by the window, peering out into the darkness of the forest, where the trees were sighing and moaning as if their old nymphs had returned, and were bewailing their old haunts, like Jephtha's daughter on the mountains of Gilead.

"Child, for whom are you looking?" I could not help saying, though it was unkind of me.

"For whom should I be looking?" she said, crossly.

"Oh, I was only joking."

"There is nothing to joke about, and no one I care to see, and you know it!" she added, with unnecessary vehemence, for she was literally aching with excitement. Suddenly she burst out: "I wonder, Miss Patience ——" Then stopping as suddenly, she threw herself down beside me, and burst into bitter tears. I let her cry on; she had been very naughty, and if she had been a child I should have scolded her.

A movement near made me look up. There stood her cousin, gazing at her with a certain mixture of surprise and gladness, for which I could not account, but the cause of which was really, that the young woman beside me was by no means perfect; indeed was at that moment manifestly a repentant sinner. He was like the rest of us, and preferred fellow-sinners to those persons who never do any wrong.

"Have you been cross, little cousin?"

To be told she is cross is what no woman out of a "memoir" can endure, so Sabrina sprang up with flaming cheeks and flashing eyes.

"I do so object to bad manners! It is usual to knock at a door."

To this he answered gently that he had knocked three times, and thought that he heard an invitation to enter.

"You are very welcome, Miles," I interposed. "We thought you would have come before."

"Speak for yourself, dear," said Sabrina; "he is welcome to stay away for ever, as far as I am concerned."

Miles grew angry at this.

"What has come to you? Is this the gentle girl I have known so long?"

"Miles, be quiet," I implored.

"There is no need," cried Sabrina, as she swept out of the room.

He looked ruefully after her; the enemy had fled, but the victor felt vanquished.

"What shall I do?" said he. "I did not mean to hurt her."

"She behaved very badly to you—but ——"

"But what?"

"I think she cares for you; I am sure she has felt your absence all these days."

I knew that I was treading on dangerous ground; meddling, in fact. Sabrina had not made a confidante of me; I was only guessing by signs and tokens, and they might be wrong. As for him, I had only seen his looks. Added to this, I had a pretty shrewd guess as to where Sabrina was; for the farmer's wife was entertaining some gossips in the kitchen; it was too wet to go out, and we had only two rooms. Consequently she must be in our bedroom, and the partition was so thin that anything above a whisper in the one room could not possibly be unheard in the other. After a silence, during which I had begun devoutly to wish that I had not interfered, Miles looked up, his countenance all aglow. The fumes of the new wine of love had evidently reached his brain. I hastened to administer a draught of the cold water of uncertainty. "But I am not sure that I am right—I really do not know—she has not been strong lately."

His face fell.

"And you, Miles?" I said.

"I love her as I can never love again," he cried passionately; "but I am afraid."

His silence after this held one at least of his listeners in tension. What was it? had he a wife already, and one of whom he was ashamed? Had he done some wrong in the past? What was it?—for I saw that he had something to disclose or confess. I was quite ready to listen.

"Look at this," said he, opening a parcel and displaying a small picture in the lamplight.

It was a half-length of an exquisitely beautiful girl, just passing from bud to flower. She was dressed in Eastern fashion, with a profusion of gauze about her, and the usual gold coins on her black hair and slender neck. The large eyes flooded the face with that sweetness, melting into melancholy, only to be seen in an Oriental countenance. No one could have looked on the original without yearning, no man without love of some sort. Miles took up another rather larger canvas and showed it me. The same girl wrapped in soft drapery, that mingled with the flow of the Nile. The afternoon sun shone through a mesh of palm-trees, the sun of a land where he is lord of every tint and odour.

I looked at him. "Miles," I said, "what does this mean? How dare you come here to disturb her peace—you are married?"

"No, no," he cried, "not so bad as that."

"Where is she?" pointing to the picture.

"Gone to her own place."

"A harem?"

"She is dead," he said, earnestly. "That is a sketch for a larger picture."

"And you come to ask us to share your grief?"

"No," he cried. "How can you wrong me so? Indeed, I never loved her. I will tell you all about it, if you will listen."

"I am all attention," I replied; and he began.

"Four months ago we were at a place called Asyoot, on the Nile: a friend and I, that is to say. Considine is not a bad fellow, though he is only an amateur and daubs fearfully: we got on very well together. Asyoot is a dry dusty hole in the daytime, with white walls and deep shadows. In the sunset it appears like Paradise, though morally it is the very reverse. Considine fell into mischief and I went to help him out and got into trouble myself, seeing this girl among the dancers."

"You fell in love with her?"

"No, indeed; but she—well, she did with me, while I was painting her. Don't laugh, please."

"I was not laughing I assure you."

"Some one was."

"No, no; go on."

"I was horrified. She fell ill, and when she seemed dying I bought her."

"Bought her!"

"Yes, it seemed the best thing to do. Her people were only too glad to be rid of her, and I took her to a convent which was not far off, meaning to leave her there to be educated if she recovered. I did not want to marry her. When we returned from the cataracts she was really dying, of low fever they said. Well, she died."

"What else?"

"After we had left her at the convent we went up the river. The whole land is asleep, and the spirit of the landscape lulled me into repose; I was content to remember Zenobi; the future was dim as a dream. I scarcely touched a brush."

"Lotus-eating?"

"Yes. In this state I fell asleep one noon, when there was not a breath of air to stir the plumes of the palms, and the very crocodiles had hidden their ugly snouts. I dreamt that I was still on the boat but it was evening, and the air was full of that soft primrose light of which I longed to reproduce the transparent clearness. On the shore stood Zenobi, with kisses hovering on her lips as she bent towards me with outstretched hands. Far above in the blue was Sabrina, just as I had painted her in my picture. I cried to her across space, but she did not answer. I knew then that I loved her. The girl below faded away, and I awoke."

"But what should you have done with Zenobi if she had lived?"

"I should not have married her. Before I speak to Sabrina, will you tell her this?"

"But your love is the child of a dream."

"No," he returned passionately. "The dream only awoke me to a sense of the reality."

"I will send her to you and you shall tell her yourself."

Of course I knew that Sabrina had heard every word. Perhaps, though—girls are so foolish—she would prefer the halting speech he would use towards her. So I went out into the passage and into our bedroom. There lay Sabrina, apparently fast asleep, with her hands folded under her hot cheek. I knew she was no more asleep than I was, but I did not dare to say anything; Miles would be sure to hear. So I went back to him, and told him he could not see her. He was sadly disappointed.

"I must go to England to-morrow about my pictures," he said. "Do not let her forget me, Miss Patience." And he wrung my hand.

V.

Forget him! there was no fear of that. I saw it in her eye, heard it in the broken modulations of her voice, and was alternately tormented and charmed by her April moods. Petulance combined with tender caresses, naughtiness mingled with humility. Of these I was the recipient, the scapegoat, a mere lay figure, as it were, to try her various humours upon. As before, she never spoke of Miles; not even when we had returned to Paris, and Margery had taken rooms near us with three of the "dear boys," who attempted their old tyranny; but that I promptly put down. Margery was curious about Miles; she knew he had been in Paris, and had an inkling that he cared for Sabrina.

"I am always afraid he will marry some penniless girl, and that means ruin to a man like him; so unpractical, you know, like all artists."

This was said to Sabrina one evening when I was absent. It was petty of Margery, but weak women are apt to take small revenges.

So the days went on, till Sabrina and I, having a holiday, stole away for a drive in the forest of St. Germain, for once without Margery and the boys. We were in the early part of May; the air was soft and balmy, the grass waved fresh that afternoon, stirred by the fingers of little vagrant breezes. The birds sang madrigals to the great green forest, all dappled with golden sunshine and shifting shadows.

At St. Germain, after leaving the railway station, we took one of the roomy 'fiacres' and started for our drive, leaving care behind; at least I can answer for myself. I think an irritating consciousness about Miles disturbed Sabrina's contentment, as we drove along the woodland paths, so narrow in some places that the branches brushed our faces. Our destination was the "Couvent des Loges," in the heart of the forest; not that we wished to visit the convent, but to gather lilies of the valley. In Paris the flower-women were selling

them for a couple of sous the small bunch, but we wanted to find them in their native home, and they grew here scattered under the trees, acres on acres of them. We left our cab and gathered and admired, while our coachman on the box read his "Petit Journal."

I am not so young as I was, and the enthusiasm of youth departs with its vitality. So I soon grew tired, while Sabrina was still eager in her search for the white bells, coyly hidden beneath their green leaves. I sat down on a mossy stump at the foot of a great beech tree, the home of many a squirrel. My feet rested on sheaves of lilies, with the mould of last year's foliage lying about them.

How frail and gentle she looked, in her pale lavender dress, with ribbons of a shade that harmonised with the tones of her hair! And how she harmonised with the afternoon, over which cool shadows were already creeping! She had been talking and laughing merrily, but when her basket was full to the brim she threw herself at my feet, holding her face down to drink in the scent of her treasures.

"My dear," I remarked, apropos of nothing, only I wanted to read a little more of her romance if I could: "My dear, which do you prefer? these lilies or the tall ones with which Miles painted you?"

There was no answer to my remark, surely as innocent as the little birds overhead, or the flowers beneath our feet, but she turned upon me with scarlet cheeks.

"Oh! how could you tell him I cared for him! Oh! how could you! Oh! my heart is broken, and you have done it."

All this in certainly heartbroken accents.

"It will mend, child; it will mend. Wait till you see him again."

"I wish never to see him again. I do so wish I had never seen him at all."

"He came to ask you to marry him that night when you behaved like a little savage."

"Well, I shall never be his squaw. Aunt Margery told me that I should be a clog on him, and that he would marry me out of pity. I said only yesterday that I would never be his wife."

We rose when the girl's sobs were quieted, picked up our baskets, and made for a charcoal-burner's hut to get some milk.

Now in the old fairy tales, the prince always arrives in time to save the princess from some evil enchantment; so now our prince appeared through the trees, but let us hope that he generally met with a better reception than Sabrina gave Miles. I was not surprised to see him—he fitted in so well with the whole thing. He shook hands with me, then turned to her. She was busy with her mantle, and feigned not to see his hand.

"How did you find us out?" I asked.

"Easily; you told your concierge where you were going. My cab is at the cross, over yonder."

"I am very glad to see you," I said. "Will you come with us and get some milk?"

"No, thank you. But will Sabrina come to me here, after she has had her milk?"

She looked vexed for a moment, then said: "I will stay now, and go for the milk after; only be quick, Miles." And she waited while I went on.

I sat in the charcoal-burner's hut, and drank milk and played with the black-eyed children in close white caps and wooden sabots, till the whole family must have been weary of me, but no Miles or Sabrina At last I sallied forth.

In the meantime this is what went on in the little dell among the flowers and young green bracken. At least it is what I put together from the hints and allusions I afterwards picked up, and I believe it is tolerably correct.

He did not ask her to marry him at once. He was, as I have said, a good young man, but he had his faults; and I reckoned it to him for a fault that he found it natural that she should love him, instead of doubting and trembling as a lover should. To be sure I had given him to understand that he was dear to her, but then——And then he had a tinge of that pharisaism which sits not ill on a very young man, but which Providence soon knocks out of him if he is worth anything. Here was a specimen of arrogance—the last time he ever indulged in it, I am happy to say.

"Child, how could you refuse me before I asked you?"

It was cruel of him, and she burst into tears and shivered with emotion.

"Aunt Margery ——" she began.

"Yes; Aunt Margery told me you would not marry me if there were no one else in the world."

"I hate you, Miles; I am ashamed of you," she flashed through her tears. "How could you say that? I hate you, Miles."

She was not going to play beggar-maid to his king Cophetua, and she was quite right too. He said nothing, and she began to move silently away. Then after a pause, when her eyes were clear of the tears, she looked up at him as he walked beside her: there was a new look in his face, a hungry yearning touched with fear.

"What is it?" said she, startled.

He fell down on his knees before her, and catching her hands buried his face in them. She tried to withdraw them.

"I never really loved you till this moment! It is bitter, Sabrina! Have pity on me."

"What do you mean?" she asked, coldly. Poor soul; she was trying to prevent her tears from dropping on the bowed head, and her hands from trembling against his lips.

"You are right to hate me," he cried. "I have hurt you, and have turned your love away when you were learning to care for me."

At this moment he looked up, and her look fell downward into his like a flower thrown into a clear pool. That cleansing humility which

is part and parcel of love, nay its very essence, shone in his eyes; joy also began to play in them.

"I am not worthy, Sabrina. And yet ——"

She could not turn her eyes away, she could not speak for a moment; then the words dropped down into his ear.

"I love you, Miles," she whispered. Then by some occult law of gravitation her head bowed lower, their lips met, and the compact was settled for ever in one long "seal of love."

When I met them they were walking slowly into the depths of the forest, a still delight in their faces, and I said:

"The cab which brought us here must take us away from this enchanted wood. You can take your garden of Eden with you; in spirit at least, young people."

"How can you be so ridiculous, Miss Patience?" This from Sabrina, but in accents that trembled with emotion.

"Nay; you are the hundred-millionth Adam and Eve. But we really must return to Paris."

"I believe you are as glad as we are, dear," said she, clinging to me as I gave them my blessing.

Most people think Miles's picture of Sabrina, as "Nymph of the Severn," a finer painting than the "Blessed Damosel," but I prefer the latter, perhaps because I saw it painted.

I see Miles and Sabrina often, but I miss my girl from my house. She is no longer my own, as I had hoped she would continue, though I rejoice at her happiness—"her full content as wife."

Oh, elderly friend of the weaker sex! whenever a young woman says to you, "Where thou goest, &c.," after the manner of Ruth, do not place implicit confidence in the declaration, for, ten chances to one, Boaz is waiting for her in some cornfield by the way!

A ROMANTIC WEDDING.

A SOUTH WALES LEGEND.

By Anne Beale.

MOST of the ancient mansions of South Wales have their legends. Some of these relate to ghosts and fairies, others to romantic incidents marvellous as they. Before the steam-whistle shrieked amid the hills and vales, these traditions were religiously believed, not only by the illiterate and superstitious peasant, but by the more cultivated proprietor, and even in this nineteenth century many are loth to acknowledge them to be mere creations of distorted imagination.

A lady, since dead, gave the writer several strange stories which may not be without interest for readers curious in such details. She was born and died in one such old mansion, and herself put faith in the friends from whom she heard them, who in their turn believed in those who related them. Thus traditions descend from generation to generation, until we fail to eliminate the true from the false, the real from the ideal. We can only "tell the tale as it was told to us," which was, after all, much what Homer must have done in his "Iliad" and "Odyssey."

The following is not only certified but dated, and was received as "authorised" by the descendants of the heroine.

In the year 1724 a daughter and heiress was born to a Squire of high degree. But her birth cost the life of her mother. The chimes that had been set a-pealing in the old church tower as soon as the news spread that the infant drew breath, soon changed to the clang of the passing bell. All the villagers who were agape with delight one instant, cried "Lord have mercy on her soul" the next, and listened with silent awe as, minute by minute, eighteen solemn warnings fell from the iron tongue of the ruler of the belfry. "Gone! and not yet out of her teens!" cried the people. "What will the Squire do without her?"

The Squire consoled himself. Scarcely had twelve months rolled away, when the joy-bells pealed forth again, and he brought a second bride to his castle, and a step-mother to his pretty baby, Ermentrude.

Hitherto the child had been the sole joy of his heart, and the light of his lonely mansion; now, a proud and haughty dame ruled him and his dependents. The new wife looked with jealous eyes on the child of the old. "I will give to my lord a son who shall displace the puling infant," she said; but no son came.

For six weary years the stately lady's jealousy of the little Ermentrude and longing for children of her own lasted; but spite and hope

were equally vain. She alienated the child who would have loved her, and in punishment, God sent to her none of her own. Yet Ermentrude flourished as a flower beneath the fostering care of her nurse. If she hid herself at the sound of her step-mother's voice, what mattered? she was received in the sheltering arms of her faithful Betto, and consoled by toffee and sugar cakes.

The Squire, her father, was self-indulgent, and troubled himself not about such trifling matters. He had a handsome wife, an heiress, and a wine cellar—what could he want more? one child was enough for him, and his lady was careful not to display before him her antipathy for Ermentrude; so no disquieting suspicions disturbed his frequent potations. Nevertheless, they were disturbed. An adversary even more fatal than his wine cup overpowered him, and that enemy was Death.

The Squire died suddenly, and the child Ermentrude, at six years of age, was heiress of all his possessions. Save her dowry, the jealous wife had nothing.

Little did Ermentrude realize her position. She scarcely understood the loss she had sustained in her father. All she knew was, that instead of her step-mother's cold salutations, she was clasped in the arms of a loving uncle, her own mother's brother, who was constituted her guardian. "What should she know of death?" She looked with terror on her father's white face and rigid form, and piteously asked him to speak to her; she stood at her nursery window while the grand funeral procession wound through the park of which she was now mistress; and she sobbed out her childish grief on her fond nurse's bosom. But no sympathetic word reached her ear from the haughty lady who remained apart in her solitary chamber.

Scarcely was the father laid in the ancestral vault, before Ermentrude was told that a great change awaited her. She was to leave the castle and live with her uncle and guardian, the Squire of Plâs Gwen, at his place some thirty miles away. When Mistress Betto said she would accompany her, the child clapped her hands with delight, for had not her uncle embraced her tenderly and vowed that he loved her for her mother's sake? She paused not to consider whether he might prove a naughty uncle, like him of "The Babes in the Wood," or to enquire concerning his only son, who would inherit the castle if she were to die; she only thought of his kisses and assurances of affection.

Accordingly, preparations were made for her departure. All her childish toys were gathered together. A warm coat was put upon her Italian greyhound, a baize covering on her canary cage, and she was dressed in her sable hat and plume. At the last moment, her uncle took her to bid farewell to her father's widow. She found her in the profoundest of weeds, and shrank from the face, now unsoftened by fair curls, and the severe white cap that surmounted it.

"You will remain here, madam, so long as you may please," said

the uncle. "Ermentrude will live with us till her majority. Her property will accumulate. She will be the greatest heiress in Wales."

"Doubtless you have your schemes, sir. You have an only son," replied the lady.

"Yes, madam. I trust they may fancy one another," was the reply. "I shall hope to return here to complete the affairs when I have committed Ermentrude to my sister's care."

But the child understood nothing of this. She touched her stepmother's cold fingers, made her curtsey, and soon found herself in her own grand coach, drawn by four fine horses. Neither did she realize, as she left her ancestral home and drove through the fine park, that what she saw was hers. Her little hand was in her uncle's. Betto sat opposite; Bo-peep, her dog, was in her lap, and her canary at her side. She was happy. She was welcomed to her new abode by her mother's only sister, a stately widow, who lived with her uncle, a widower. Husbands and wives seemed strangely and early separated in her family. She was introduced to her cousin, a boy a few years her senior, from whom she shrank, as never having been accustomed to children. He, also, eyed her askance, and the commencement of their proposed courtship was not favourable. Still, they were intended for one another, and their elders nodded and smiled at this shyness, and said it would soon wear off. Mistress Betto looked on, and thought the match suitable enough, though she had her ideas concerning an alliance between cousins. "But maybe this one is made in heaven," she soliloquized afterwards.

The boy's name was Aubrey, and he soon became the slave of the imperious little maiden who shared his tasks and sports. He heard that she was to be his when they were old enough, together with her vast estates, and he was nothing loth. She, too, was made to understand that they were intended for one another. "Thou shalt not have me or my lands," she was wont to say; and to her nurse she would add: "In sooth Aubrey is a milksop, and I love him not. Besides, he is my cousin, and thou knowest, Betto, that I cannot marry one so near of kin." This, as she grew up to maidenhood.

"It progresses well, sister," whispered her uncle, aside.

"It is as it should be," replied Dame Dorothy, the aunt.

They were a cold and diplomatic pair. But Aubrey was, as Ermentrude declared, a milksop. He was but a vain and silly youth, and not one to win the heart of a high-spirited girl, such as she.

There was, however, a neighbouring knight who sometimes came to the Plâs, whose secret suit sped better. Guardians, like love, are often blind, and the Squire bethought himself not that a maiden scarcely yet fifteen would be forward enough to fancy a man of one-and-twenty, or that his neighbour, Sir Tudor ap Griffith, would fall in love with a child. Yet so it was.

"I am going to the castle to-morrow to see after thy property,

Ermentrude," said the uncle, one morning. "I shall be absent two days. Aubrey will take care of thee and of Aunt Dorothy."

"I am fifteen, and can take care of myself, sir," replied the young lady, with a saucy curtsey. "Besides, it is I who must take care of Aubrey. He has not the spirit of a mouse."

"Yes, child; thou hast the greater courage, as should be, seeing that when you two are wed, thine will be the larger inheritance."

"And when is that to come to pass?" asked Ermentrude, gravely.

"When thou art grown to womanhood, I reckon, in a year or so, or maybe sooner," responded the uncle.

Ermentrude made him a profound reverence as he stood before her, and a naughty little mou as he turned his back. Then she hastened to her nurse and bade her take holiday.

"Thou shalt order Shon, the groom, to saddle my mare, and thou shalt ride behind him on my pillion to Castell Coch, and thou shalt take a note from me to Sir Tudor ap Griffith, and thou shalt await his answer," were the damsel's hasty orders.

"To Castell Coch! It is over twenty good miles!" cried Betto, uplifting her hands.

"Ah! but thou must do it, for thou knowest that I will never wed my cousin Aubrey, for he is a foolish fellow, and I love a man of mettle. Sir Tudor will order what is best, and thou must be quick. He told me what to do when uncle went from home, and thou art my only confidante."

Ermentrude threw her arms round her nurse, who had never thwarted her; and no sooner had the Squire departed, than Shon, groom, with Betto on a pillion at his back, was trotting off in the direction of Castell Coch.

"I have given her a holiday, and may be she will not be back to-night," explained Ermentrude.

"Thou takest too much upon thee, child," replied Dame Dorothy.

"I am no longer a child, ma'am," returned Ermentrude, offended.

"We will be grand when we are of age to wed," put in Aubrey.

Ermentrude passed a restless day. No Betto appeared. But she and Shon returned the following day and brought with them a missive from Sir Tudor Ap Griffith.

"Meet me to-morrow morning at seven of the clock beneath Llewellen's Oak," it ran, and Ermentrude was in a mighty fluster at the prospect of so soon seeing her lover.

"My bones ache with forty miles on horseback," pleaded Mistress Betto. "I can never be up and abroad so early."

"Then I go alone," replied the imperious maiden.

Little sleep visited her eyes that night, and she was astir with the song-birds at early dawn. She felt blithe as they, and would have sung as cheerily had she not feared to be heard. She aroused her nurse, who, despite her stiffened limbs, arose and did her bidding.

Long ere the big clock struck seven, they were away to the woods.

Never before was such a bright May morning. Ermentrude danced through blue bells and hyacinths and anemones—by hawthorn and cherry-blossom and fern-frond—beneath larch and oak and aspen. Earth was alight with dew drops through which the sunbeams pierced, and lights and shadows played at hide and seek in each forest glade. The birds warbled so lustily that the very sky and air seemed alive with melody, and all nature held jubilee to greet the glad child and her knightly lover.

"How slow thou art, Betto. We shall not reach the oak in time," cried Ermentrude.

"I am repenting of my ride of yesterday," answered the nurse.

"Fie, Betto! But I see him! And he wears his gayest suit to meet me," laughed Ermentrude, clapping her hands and running forwards. "Nay, but a stranger is with him," she added, pausing and frowning.

Beneath a gigantic oak stood a gallant youth, clad in the velvet and lace of the period. He advanced to meet her, and kneeling on the dewy sod, respectfully kissed her hand.

"I have brought the priest and the ring," he said.

"But what will my guardian say?" asked Ermentrude, charmed, yet terrified.

"What matters it? Come quickly, and let us be married, or he will wed you to Aubrey."

Betto began to remonstrate, but the youth led the scarcely reluctant maiden to Llewellen's Oak, where stood a priestly form in full canonicals, prayer book in hand.

"A fine church, truly, and a grand choir," laughed Ermentrude, as she set foot on the soft moss beneath the big oak, and heard the birds carolling in the huge branches.

What would she know of matrimony? She loved Sir Tudor with all her heart, and would obey him in all things; so she stood with him, half amused, half frightened, before the priest, and the marriage service began. But she sobered as she listened, and would have stayed it half-way, had not her fiery bridegroom urged her on. Still, she smiled as he placed the ring on her finger, and wept a little when they knelt together to receive the benediction and exhortation of the facile priest. It was easier to get married in those days than these.

But scarcely was the solemn service ended when she suddenly jumped up, exclaiming, "The bell! The bell!" and without further ceremony took to her heels, followed by her faithful nurse.

"By my troth it is a fine thing to be married," she exclaimed, as they reached the Plâs just as the big breakfast bell ceased to inform the world that it was eight o'clock.

"Where hast thou been, child? Thy dress is disarranged and damp, thy hair dishevelled?" said Aunt Dorothy.

"To the woods to hear the birds sing," she replied, holding down her head, abashed.

Meanwhile Sir Tudor and his recreant parson had mounted their

horses and ridden off, setting the bells of all the village churches a ringing as they went.

"For the marriage of Sir Tudor Ap Griffith with the beautiful Ermentrude of Castell Mawr," he explained, as he scattered gold pieces among bell ringers and sextons.

And still the young bride thought within herself, "It is a fine thing to be married."

But when her uncle returned at midday, she wondered if, after all, that golden circlet which she wore on her finger had quite transformed the world into paradise.

"What means this, niece?" he asked, severely. "The church bells are set agoing everywhere, and they tell me it is for the marriage of Sir Tudor Ap Griffith and my kinswoman, Ermentrude Traherne."

"And so it is, uncle," upspoke the bride. "We were married this morning."

"Married, you young minx!" cried her uncle, seizing her by the arm and shaking her. "Who taught thee to tell lies to thy elders?"

"They are not lies, for see the ring," she cried, bravely; believing that the sight of it would pacify her uncle.

But he stamped with rage, and dragged the dauntless maiden to her chamber, calling her many naughty names as they went, and threatening vengeance.

"Thou mayst imprison, but thou canst not unmarry me," she said, when he loosened his grasp.

"I can and I will!" he cried, leaving her to her reflections, as he locked her into her solitary chamber. Then he sought the trembling Betto, and turned her unceremoniously out of his house. Truly he was in a furious passion. And scarcely less furious was his son, Aubrey. He loved his cousin a little, and her broad acres more. So he made common cause with his father, and they rode off to the notaries to see what could be done.

Ermentrude had plenty of time for reflection. She remained in solitary state a whole weary week. No Aunt Dorothy! No Betto! Only her uncle, followed at meal times by her aunt's maid; for although in durance, she was not doomed to bread and water.

"Thou shalt be free so soon as thou promise to renounce him who has deceived thee into a sham marriage, and to take as thy affianced thy cousin Aubrey, to whom thou art betrothed."

"I am not betrothed to Aubrey, and will not wed him," cried Ermentrude, bravely.

"And I, as thy guardian, swear thou shalt not have that false Sir Tudor, who has wheedled thee forth to this sham bridal."

"Heigh ho! I would I were of age," sighed Ermentrude.

But her courage did not flinch. She beguiled the time as best she might, with her pets, her embroidery, and her few books, reading with unusual persistence those of devotion. Especially did she peruse

daily the marriage service, as set forth in the book of Common Prayer. This encouraged her to resistance, inasmuch as she believed she was lawfully wed. She even kept up her spirits by song, and her favourite ditty was the song of Lovelace to Althea.

"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for a hermitage.
If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone, that soar above,
Enjoy such liberty."

She did not pause to reflect whether her mind was "innocent and quiet," but the verse consoled her.

On the seventh morning from that of her woodland bridal, she was looking out of her window in, it must be confessed, melancholy mood. From her apartment she could see a vast expanse of country, for her uncle's house stood high. Many times a day, if not quite all day long, she had gazed on a certain turnpike road that wound through wood and mead down below, and had repeated aloud, as if to some invisible friend, the words of Blue Beard's imprisoned wife: "Sister Ann, Sister Ann, do you see anybody coming?" But nobody had appeared save her cousin Aubrey. He managed to be always in sight; but she took no heed of his signals and vagaries.

On this seventh morning, however, she perceived a troop of twenty horsemen galloping furiously. In front was one who led by the bridle a milk-white steed, which was riderless.

"It is! It must be!" she cried, breathlessly, gazing until the cavalcade was out of sight.

Then she was conscious of a strange commotion in and without the house. She did not know that her uncle kept all his servants ready armed, or that he and Aubrey were also armed. But the twenty horsemen suddenly reappeared, tearing up the drive. She perceived that the white horse bore a lady's saddle, and that he who led the men was Sir Tudor Ap Griffith. Instantly she waved a white scarf towards him, and he kissed his hand in return.

"What will be next?" she ejaculated.

What happened next she could not see; but it was highly melodramatic. The twenty horsemen were met at the threshold of the Squire's door by twelve armed retainers. But Sir Tudor was worth them all. Jumping from his horse, he seized on the malicious uncle, presented a pistol at his throat, and exclaimed, "My bride, or your life!" Such conduct, and the sight of the nineteen followers, cowed the domestics, and caused Aubrey to run away. Ermentrude was right. He was but a milksop indeed! Moreover, her uncle was compelled to deliver up the key. Betto unexpectedly appeared and led the gallant spouse to his imprisoned bride. The nurse, it had been,

who, being ignominiously expelled, had managed to communicate with Sir Tudor, and thus been the means of the present adventure.

"I knew you would come," cried Ermentrude, clapping her hands as Sir Tudor entered.

But it was not into his arms she threw herself, but into those of her faithful nurse, from whom she had never before been separated. Sir Tudor, however, soon enfolded her in his, with the words, "My wife! my dear wife!" and carried her off triumphantly.

"Declare our marriage, parson," he added, as he hastened down the great staircase, followed by Betto.

A smooth-faced priest, one of the furious riders, advanced towards the discomfited Squire, and announced that he had married them by "book and bell," under the greenwood tree.

"Poltroons! robbers! villains all! cried the Squire. "Aubrey, come, assert thyself!" But Aubrey was nowhere to be seen.

"Good-bye, uncle; good-bye, Aunt Dorothy. Thou wilt come after us, Betto," cried Ermentrude, when she was seated by her bridegroom on the white palfrey.

And so, as the story goes, "They loved and they rode away."

FROM THE ITALIAN OF PLUTARCH, ON HIS LOST LOVE.

The breeze refreshing, and the fragrance sweet,
And flowering beauty of the laurel's shade,
My guiding star, and wearied life's retreat,
Earth's devastating death in dust hath laid.

As Phœbus darkened by his sister's veil,
So doth all kindly light my soul forsake;
And death as death's sole antidote I hail,
Such gloomy thoughts doth love within me wake.

One short, sweet slumber, lady, thou hast slept,
Then woke for ever 'mid those spirits blest;
Who, in the great Creator's bosom wrapt,
Enjoy their long-sought, everlasting rest.

But, oh, if yet my humble rhyme have worth,
To win a place upon the scroll of fame,
'Mid those whose echoes ne'er are lost on earth,
Perpetual glory shall attend thy name.

Alice King.

THE MAN FROM C——.

"SCOTS-MIN! Edinburry Courant! Glasgy Herald!"

Truly the land o' cakes is reached at last, as these melodious cries inform us. We stretched ourselves after the stiffening process of a night journey, enlivened by one brief and dazzling break when we were sleepiest; a ten minutes' respite at a station where wide-awake young ladies preside over cups of coffee and other mixtures less approved by the Blue Ribbon Army, in brilliant gas-light; and we drowsily swallow something, regarding these Hebes of the night as if they had been performing in one of the Christmas pantomimes of our youthful days, where even the brightest fairy became indistinct through the merciful mist of sleep.

Tickets were an unremembered evil as we rolled into the station at Edinburgh, for the terrific responsibility of those bits of pasteboard had been taken off our minds some thirty miles away, and we were free to land with our traps, and partake of an "Express" breakfast at two shillings and sixpence.

I was hailed by a cordial Scotch voice when half way through my meal.

"E-h, now, this is a good sight, Goring! You're going further North, of course?"

"Yes, presently. I'm only taking a pleasure ramble."

"Then don't spoil it by sticking in Edinburgh, for the heat is unbearable, and our American cousins have filled the hotels, demoralised the waiters by large tips, and are now busy buying pieces of hot woollen tartan, and imaginary heraldic devices in silver, as trophies to take home. Come on to Blankshire to-day."

"Let a fellow breathe, Christie!" I pleaded.

"You can't, if you stay here," persisted the energetic Scotchman; "and it's only an hour or two more of misery, and you'll find yourself in a snug inn beside a loch that it almost cools one to remember."

"I'm not so very hot," I ventured to remark, for the early morning air was fresh to a Londoner.

"You're as obstinate as ever, I see," said Christie, complacently.

My eyes were lifted in mild rebuke, for if during all my life I ever met a pig-headed fellow at an argument, my once fellow-student was the man. I was not sufficiently refreshed to argue with him then, however, so acquiesced in all his arrangements, and soon we were on our way to the inn and loch so appreciated by my friend.

A day or two convinced me that we had hit upon a pleasant spot; and the landlady of the inn, an active industrious body, looked after our bodily comfort to admiration. Christie had several times visited the inn, and agreed with all I could say in its praise.

"It wasn't half as snug, though, until she came!" he said one day. "The landlord wasn't much of a manager. He only married a few years ago, and a queer story it made, that wedding."

Of course I asked for the story, there being nothing else to do till the hissing noise at the kitchen fire should result in the serving of our dinner.

"Well, Donald was a confirmed bachelor, and might have been one now, but for the industrious perseverance of an old friend of his own, whom we will call the man from C——. He never met Donald without pointing out how much better the inn would thrive if he gave it a mistress. Donald was a very silent man, and a good listener, but in reply to the invariable remark of the man from C—— 'E-h, mon, ye should marry!' Donald never said more than a careless 'Ou-aye.'

"At last, however, the stone began to show signs of being worn away with perpetual dropping, and Donald cautiously relented.

"'If I'm to get married, then, ye'll just hae to find a wife for me!'

"'Ah, noo! That I'll do, and gladly!' said the man from C——.

"A few weeks later he returned from a place some twenty miles away, and hailed Donald with a zeal that couldn't have been warmer if he had been securing a partner for himself.

"'Noo, Donald, I've just found the very wummin for ye!' Donald puffed silently at his pipe, and looked stolidly across the loch in front here.

"'Ye'll come over and see her on Thursday. I'm gaein' mysel' that day.'

"'Na,' said Donald in a determined voice, 'I'll no come to see her! but ye can ask her if she'll marry me.'

"The man from C—— was aghast, and tried in vain to alter Donald's resolution; the landlord knew his own mind, and continued. 'Ye'll ask her if she'll hae me, and if she says yes ye'll just ask her when, and when it's sattled I'll go and get married, and that's a' aboot it.'

"Accordingly the devoted friend procured the bride's consent, and on the day appointed Donald went over, and the ceremony proceeded. When it was ended, he turned to the man from C——, who had presided like a benevolent fairy at the scene, and said, 'I dunna like the wummin at a'!'

"In horror the friend clutched his arm, and with a hushed and prolonged 'E——h!' endeavoured to smooth matters, the bride, let us hope, not hearing.

"'I'm sure she's a very nice wummin, Donald.'

"'I dunna like her,' said the relentless bridegroom.

"'It's no right o' ye to say sic things, Donald! Ye'll just gae awa' wi' your wife, noo——'

"'Then ye must come awa too!' said Donald, in a determined voice; and the man from C—— met his required fate."

"Good heavens! said I, as the story ended, "aren't they miserable?"

"Not a bit. She manages Donald, and the house; keeps tipsy customers in bounds and good order, and always has the house full. It's better than a love-match, I assure you; and the man from C—— congratulates himself and Donald every time they meet."

Our dinner was served piping hot by the heroine of the tale, and was so good, I began to think of asking the man from C—— to find a wife for me too.

A few days later my friend Christie had occasion to call at a tiny stone-built cottage, just a "but and a ben," he explained to me, to ask an old woman there for a fishing net she had in hand for him. I accompanied him, and the door was opened to us by a very frail-looking little woman, some seventy years of age. She looked much disturbed in her mind, and when Jack Christie asked if his net was done, she shook her head.

"Indeed, Mr. Christie, I'm fashed so with them in there," pointing to a small locked door which communicated with another little house, as much like her own as irregular old cottages ever are, "I canna get my wark done."

"What! aren't they at peace yet, Granny?"

"Na, nor ever will be in this world," said the old woman solemnly. "And it's hard telling what may happen after; but," added she, with a firm and vicious snap of her old mouth, "*he'll* gae to the place appointed for him!"

What this place was so plainly revealed itself to the hearers that I turned away to hide a smile at this refined way of putting it.

"Well, let me have the net as soon as you can, Granny. I'll be passing by again soon."

When we were walking on again, Christie said:

"That's an old character! Her daughter's matrimonial bickers and 'dustings,' as she calls them, are the plague of her life. They live in the next cottage, and when there's a row they try to get through to her by that small door which she keeps religiously locked since some events which happened a few months ago."

"I say, Christie, you're a sort of private 'Matrimonial News!' Where do you get your stories?"

"I have an expression of much solid wisdom, as you have no doubt observed, and it invites confidence. I must tell you, however, the tale of Bob and Bet, as I had it from Bet's mother. These two fools made a love-match, and by the time their first child was four months old they 'dusted' so continually that the situation brought about a crisis. Bob is a bricklayer, and his daily return from work was greeted by not only words but blows, from his termagant wife. In vain he urged her to leave him, and let him get someone to mind the child—in vain he endeavoured to persuade her to peace. At last he said:

"'Weel, gang yer ain gait, and I'll gae mine.'

"The fury watched him as he put together his clothes and tied them in a bundle, sneering at him all the time. When he had his bundle safe in one hand, he picked up the four months' old baby in the other, and marched forth. Then was Bet's turn to quake! She could not get the child, for the big man held it high, and went away to his mother, a mile of. Bet burst into her mother's cottage, in screaming grief.

"'He's gane, mither, he's gane, and I maun just get awa to Margaret Dewar's and bide the nicht.'

"Now Margaret Dewar was the scandal-lover and mischief-maker of the place, and old Granny was wiser than some mothers.

"'Ye'll do nothing of the kind, Bet! Ye'll just bide in yer ain house, and keep still.'

"'But my bairn, my bairn! I canna live without my bairn.'

"'Bide ye still, Bet Tulloch! Ye'll sune hae yer bairn again!' said her mother, with the shrewdest wisdom and contempt.

"Next morning Bob's mother arrived humbly at Granny's door carrying the baby, who had screamed unmercifully all night, and reduced its father to ashes in his humiliating ignorance of how to manage it! Bob loafed about for a day or two, and then came home to be jeered at the more. Now they fight equally, and his blows to Bet make Granny think him a brute."

"That's why she has settled his 'appointed place' for him," said I

"Yes, and that is how so many romantic marriages end," observed Christie, with a solemn nod.

"Upon my word, it seems a pity that some wise and astute agent like the 'Man from C——,' who knows people's wants better than they do themselves, should not be appointed in every parish in Scotland," remarked I. "He's a valuable fellow, and I should like to make his acquaintance."

"There's one other thing better," said Jack Christie, shrewdly: "and that is not to marry at all."

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"SHE IS AT PEACE," SAID THE HIGHLANDER, SOLEMNLY.

THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

By ISABELLA FYVIE MAYO.

CHAPTER XL.

EDGAR TO THE RESCUE.

ILL news travels quickly. And the report that Miss Vivian had been found lying on the road-side in a fainting-fit, soon spread itself about Dering. Dr. Palmer, one of the first to hear of it, at once betook himself to the Court.

Maria was better by that time, but weak and languid. She told Dr. Palmer that she was in great distress of mind when walking home, and felt strangely giddy, but did not remember falling. She confided to him, old friend that he was, that the cause of her distress was that cruel newspaper paragraph, and the terror-stricken interview she had sought and held with Mr. Grale. Possibly she confided to the doctor something more, but if so, that item was not to be regarded as public property. He had a perfect sympathy with poor Maria; but it would have comforted her more, had she felt that he had a perfect trust in her brother Edgar.

Dr. Palmer had not lost faith in Edgar Vivian. Nay, strange as it may sound, he had more faith in him than in his innocence. The Doctor knew much of the awful secrets of poor human nature, and how from any unguarded heart, however promising its soil, there may unexpectedly rise the upas of a great crime, not indeed indigenous to it, but springing into sudden life from some chance seed that has lain dormant and undetected.

"You are not to attend me as a patient, Doctor," Maria said to him, with a wan smile. "It would alarm my uncle and aunt, and perhaps lead to some disagreeable rumour reaching them. They think the heat overpowered me, and that I was tired with my journey. I shall be all right—outwardly—to-morrow."

Dr. Palmer fully understood. He saw Maria once or twice, when paying his visits to George, who did not seem to recover as he ought; and a few days passed on.

"Do you think Maria Vivian will see me, if I call, papa?" asked Agnes Palmer, one slumbrous August afternoon. "Is she well enough to do so? I should like to go up there."

"She will be sure to see you," replied the Doctor. "You are her great favourite, you know, Agnes."

And so Agnes started off in the evening, leaving Lettice in the midst of her white bridal sewing. Lettice stood at her casement, watching her sister go swiftly and firmly down the road. Agnes looked back ere she turned the corner, and kissed her hand.

"Why should all the happiness be mine?" Lettice sighed, as she resumed her task. "Agnes will never care for anyone else as she could have cared for Edgar Vivian—aye, as she does care for him, whatever be the truth of this mystery. Poor Agnes! To think how happy she might have been!"

Never mind, Lettice. There are those who willingly leave the fertile valleys for the bleak mountain peaks. The eagle shuns not the storm, catching in it wild ecstasies of passion and power, and glorious secrets of air and sky and sea, of which the little linnet in her sheltered nest can scarcely dream.

Agnes did not make her visit very long: and if she brought Maria any special comfort, she must have conveyed it in her kiss and hand-clasp, for their talk was of simple things, of little incidents in the lives of their humble neighbours, and of Lettice's preparations for her wedding-day. They both knew that this was best, and neither misunderstood the other's reticence. When Agnes took leave, Maria did not leave her room, or ring to summon a servant. To be sure, Agnes Palmer was a very intimate friend at the Court, and accustomed to find her way about there without ceremony. Or possibly Maria was growing a little indifferent and forgetful of conventional courtesies.

Going through the hall, Agnes had to pass the door of the dining-room, which stood open. Edgar Vivian was seated there. He sprang up, and came forward to greet her, and stepped with her across the terrace bareheaded.

"What a beautiful evening—yet it is cool," she said. "If you are coming down the avenue, had you not better take your hat?" she added, kindly. It was her maidenly way of giving him leave to come.

He said nothing, but went back into the house and returned, wearing it.

"Maria seems to be wonderfully well," she remarked.

"Perhaps you expected to find her very ill," he answered.

"She has been talking and laughing with me."

"Ah, she bears up 'wonderfully,'—the word you have just used.

You and I both know what is the matter with her," he added, bitterly. "It is only sorrow and misery."

"Well," said Agnes, "that is why she will get better now. She knows the worst. It was a blow to discover how ready the world is to lightly accuse. But the pain of that will pass. Knowing your innocence ——"

"Stay, Agnes," he interrupted. "Am I entitled to feel that anybody in this world can *know* my innocence?"

"Yes," cried Agnes, "because they know you."

He stood still, under the shadow of the trees, and faced her. "Good men," he said, "men far better than I have ever been—could ever be—have yet fallen into sudden sin and crime."

"Yes, Edgar, that may be," she said, using his Christian name, which she had not done lately. "That may be—might be—though I cannot recall an instance. But such men would not cover their fall with silence for months. They would not shrink from the truth, and they would never deny it when the accusation came."

"But people may well feel that I have shrunk from the truth, and have been guilty of evasion. I could not speak out at once, as I might have done. Why, even your father ——" he paused with quivering lip.

"I know you too well to doubt," Agnes repeated. "I am sure I do. Edgar, is there nobody, think you, who can imagine that the shrinking and evasion may be for Allan's sake, and not for your own. For his sake, and partly for Maria's sake?"

"God bless you, Agnes," said Edgar, fervently. He slackened his pace a little, for they were nearing the lodge, and perhaps he yearned to defer their parting.

"Should you not take a longer walk in the delicious air of this lovely evening?" asked Agnes, with the divine courage of womanhood in ministration. "How long it is since you have been to see us! And Lettice will be going away soon. I know papa is at home to-night, and he will be pleased to see you."

The young man shrank a little. "I will come down to your place very soon," he said. "But not now—not with you. Do you know what the people call me?"

She looked at him, her strong helpful love glowing in her eyes. "I do," she answered; then paused and spoke.

"Come."

Without a word, he went. It was to him as a queen's command.

Agnes felt herself trembling with excitement, but outwardly she was perfectly cool and bright.

"You used to be very severe upon me. You did not spare my idleness and my failures," said the young man. "How can you take my part so resolutely now?"

"Perhaps I was too severe," she answered softly; "and yet—no."

"You were not," he said decidedly. "No, Agnes, no. Only how

can you be so patient and forbearing now, when worse evils than you foresaw have come to pass?"

She did not answer. How could she say, "When the world turns against those we love, we must ourselves stand beside them."

They walked on in silence. The thought of her heart was: "How is this cloud of suspicion to be lifted from him? Providence can never intend him to go in its shadow for ever. His innocence must be made clear. It must! It shall!"

And the thought of his heart was: "What does all the rest matter if she trusts me? One can live down anything. And the world is wide. And Heaven is wider."

They were walking down that part of the Dering road, where on the one hand there was no hedge-row, nothing but thick irregular bushes. To plunge among these for a few paces would bring one within that great circle of ancient trees, in whose centre lay the solemn waters of the Black Pool. The two walked in silence. It was only natural that each mind reverted to the terrible mystery which had been enacted there, and each could guess what was in the other's thoughts. But suddenly each face turned to the other, with an expression of startled horror.

For it seemed to their highly-wrought nerves almost as if their thoughts had taken palpable form! Did each hear something? Did each hear the same? A shriek—a cry—a confusion of painful struggle.

They stood still—Agnes grasping Edgar's arm. But only for a moment. Just as she relaxed her hold, and he darted swiftly among the bushes towards the pool, two women came running from its direction. One was the smith's wife—the other a stranger. They were running, but paused when they saw Edgar, seeming too excited to notice Agnes.

"It will be all right now! The gentleman will save him!" cried the one.

"He'll never go in!" retorted the other. "That's Cain, you know. He'll not dare the Black Pool—of all places in the world."

But as Edgar went plunging among the brambles over the uneven ground, they turned to follow him. Then Agnes overtook them.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

The smith's wife turned with a start. "Oh, Miss Agnes," she said, "it's a little boy fallen into the water—a child belonging to one of the harvest workers from London. It's as much as the other women can do to keep the mother from going in after him."

"Has it only just happened?" asked Agnes, hastening on beside the women.

"Aye, this very minute," answered the strange woman. "If you were a-walkin' down the road, you must have heard the mother's screams."

"Mr. Edgar Vivian will save the child: he is a splendid swimmer," said Agnes.

The smith's wife was silent. She was wondering whether Miss Palmer had heard what she said about "Cain." Also, she was still asking herself whether, in the present case, young Vivian's will would be equal to his prowess.

Before they cleared the underwood, and came out in full sight of the Pool, the young man had thrown aside his hat and coat, and was in the water. The child's body had already risen once, beyond his reach. There was a deathlike silence over the exciting scene. The poor mother had fallen with her face in the grass, unable to watch.

The child rose again to the surface, not very far from Edgar's hand. He struck out boldly. Just as the waters closed over it again, he dived. There was a moment of breathless suspense.

He reappeared, grasping the child in one arm, and swimming with the other. A few seconds brought him to the bank.

The child was living, but had of course suffered something from its immersion, and was hurried off with its mother to the nearest cottage. The rough matrons were no sooner assured of its well-being than they turned to Edgar Vivian.

"The poor body can't thank you yet, sir," said one, "but she'll be up at your house and down at your feet to-morrow. She's a widow woman, and the child's all she's got, and it's as much as she can do to keep it an' herself from starving, and she do make a work with it!"

"Aye," cried another, shrilly, "and it's always the best-watched brats that accidents happen to."

"But please go and get your clothes changed as soon as ever you can, sir," pleaded the smith's wife, in her most kindly and civil manner. "I'd urge you to come to our place, but it is scarce ten yards nearer here than the Court is, and I reckon you'll like that better. It's to be hoped you weren't heated when you plunged in, sir, for if anything went wrong with you, we'd never forgive ourselves."

Edgar laughed—a gayer laugh than he had given for months. These were the people who had been so ready to fix a blot on his fair fame, if not a rope about his neck! "I am not afraid of cold water," he said. "But I'll take care of myself, never fear."

He hurried back to the Court, Agnes and the smith's wife looking after him.

"May I be forgiven for calling him Cain!" said the woman. "I always did say he would never have harmed a fly except in the heat of passion. But he had no more hand in it than my baby. I'm sure of that now. If he had had, he'd never have jumped into that there same pool with a will—and shown the bright clear face to us that he had when he came out. No, no; whoever it might be that did that wicked deed, 'twas not Mr. Edgar Vivian."

This might not be logic, but it was the outburst of genuine faith.

CHAPTER XLI.

A CONFESSION.

HAD it not been for Agnes Palmer, the widow woman, Mary Letts—mother of the child whom Edgar Vivian had saved from drowning in the Black Pool—would have left Dering without any demonstration of gratitude beyond a message left with the blacksmith's wife. This reserve rose not from defect of feeling, but from its excess. The young gentleman had come, like a strong angel, at the right moment, and had saved her boy; and she could not express what she felt. She only said simply "that he had done enough: and would they give him her duty and her blessings, and tell him she would pray to her dying day that he might have his heart's best desire."

And so she would have passed on, to day-labours in the fields of the next parish. But Agnes Palmer stopped her. Agnes had made friends with the woman, and had learnt all her pitiful story of the past; her husband's early death in London, where they lived, and her own bitter struggles to pick up a poor living honestly, to support herself and child. That had been a difficult thing to do, more and more difficult it seemed to the woman as time went on, for work grew scarcer, and those who needed it more numerous; so she had come down to the country at harvest time, hoping to obtain some field work there. Agnes was much taken with the poor helpless woman, and determined to do something for her if possible. Edgar had saved the woman from a great and bitter sorrow by rescuing her child from death; she, Agnes, would strive to help her in life.

But Agnes found that this was easier thought of than done. People with whom she took counsel, told her there was nothing particularly sad about the story; there were hundreds, thousands, like Mary Letts in London; and they advised her to send her on her way.

But Agnes persevered, in spite of difficulties, which met her at every turn. The ways of Mary Letts were not the ways of the villagers. The most hopeless women of Dering, old or young, were neat and clean and managing, compared with poor Mary Letts, who had not been trained to tidiness; neither had she decent clothes. She could not satisfy the village matrons at the wash-tub or the cooking-stove. According to their standard, she did not know how to sweep a room, or to make a bed. What could be done with her?

Agnes found her most sympathetic and helpful ally in the singular, independent sewing-woman, Miss West, who still made Dering her head quarters, though she was often away from it. Her services had been required for Letty's trousseau, and both the Palmer sisters were interested in her strong, reticent character.

"There's some place for everybody in this world, Miss Palmer," spoke the yellow woman, "and we have to find Mary Letts's corner; and it will be found."

She said this at a juncture, when Agnes was almost in despair about the matter. And her strong assurance, apparently born of experience, seemed the faith which removes mountains. For within a week of her utterance, Mary Letts dropped into her niche!

When Agnes heard the news she rushed home, and burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter, before she could tell it to Letty. Her laughter was almost contagious beforehand; it became altogether so, once her tidings were imparted.

"Mary Letts is to be housekeeper to Old Mittens!"

Now old Mittens was a local "character." He lived at Carstow, and because he was dirty and odd, he had the reputation of being a miser—a reputation which he repudiated so energetically that people believed it all the more. He resided in a ruinous little house—his own property—was a bachelor—now about eighty years old, and had spent his life as a "miscellaneous dealer,"—a gatherer of rags, bones, waste-paper, provision tins and old bottles, from all the villages round. Mittens' habits were peculiar; every pound of his strange, unsavoury stock was always turned over with the utmost care—tradition having it that his discovery in early youth of a diamond ring in a dust box was the origin of this custom. Mittens and his housekeepers had been a standing topic in the neighbourhood for the last half-century. Decent, notable widows or spinsters would have nothing to do with the grimy establishment of the grimy old man, and his temper and patience had been sorely tried by a succession of vixens and "trollops," as he chose to call them.

One day, when the old horse and cart, going the regular rounds, pulled up before the blacksmith's house, Mittens, descending from his perch, proceeded to pour forth his not unusual story of household woe and desertion; he having turned his last "baggage" out of doors the previous day for drunkenness. The blacksmith's wife felt a sudden inspiration—Mary Letts! It might prove an act of real charity to him as well as to her, to recommend her.

And so Mary Letts was called to the conference, and listened to particulars. Mittens would feed and house her and her boy after his fashion, but he would not speak about wage "until he saw," as he said, with grim foreboding, born of perennial disappointment. But Mary had little fear. The thought of peace and settlement was everything to her. She knew she should be quite satisfied with his larder, which the "trollops" had grumbled at, after her past years of semi-starvation. She could grow fat upon morsels of dripping and scraps of bacon rind, with occasional feasts of periwinkles and watercress.

She went off at once with her child in Mittens' creaking cart—a contented, truly thankful woman. Old Mittens, in spirits at having so readily found a fresh help, and one likely to suit, condescended to a little sociability, and asked her what the particulars were about the boy's having been fished out of the Black Pool, and thereby his life saved, by Mr. Edgar Vivian.

"Oh, that was it, was it," said old Mittens, after he had listened to the account she gave. "And the women be saying now as Mr. Edgar Vivian never did the t'other thing, be they! Well, I never thought as he did do it; not me. 'Twas said a good deal turned upon his not being able to find a letter what was writ to him by t'other one, young Grale. I shouldn't wonder but that there letter is among some o' my collected scraps, but I didn't know on't when I first looked 'em over, and I can't be bothered to look again."

Mary Letts took in the words eagerly. She had been long enough at Dering to hear all about the fatal history and Mr. Edgar Vivian's inability to produce the letter which he professed to have received from Scotland. "I'll look among the scraps for that letter myself if I'm given the opportunity," thought the grateful woman.

A day or two after this brought the marriage of Charles Carr and Lettice Palmer. It was a lovely morning in September.

There could not have been a quieter wedding. Both wished it so, for their own sakes, though they might have given up their wishes to please others. It was for others' sake, however, that they secured theirs.

At another time, when all the Court family might have been present, Charles Carr would have selected his old school-fellow, Mark Acland, for his groomsman: and there would have been two bridesmaids, Agnes Palmer and Maria Vivian. But now there could be only Agnes; and Charles, putting aside young Acland, made a point of selecting Edgar Vivian: who accepted the post. A wedding group, and those two, the Vivians, in it, with such a past as lay immediately behind them, could only be solemn and quiet. But the shadow of the Future was on them too. For the angel of Death stood on the threshold of Dering Court. There was not one in the village who did not know that George Vivian was dying—except, perhaps, George himself.

"And surely he must know it too!" thought Maria, watching him as he lay on a sofa at one of the windows which commanded a wide view of the surrounding country, and from which he might catch a distant glimpse of the white-robed bridal party as they left the little church.

Surely, surely, he must know it! Even the strange hopefulness, characteristic of the malady, could scarcely delude him into a belief that those livid, transparent hands could once more flush with the ruddy hue of health, that that peculiar and ghostly voice could ever again shout or sing!

Yet George would still say that he should soon be quite well, if only he could get to Ragan; and with the friends he had there he still kept up a constant correspondence, though the letters on his side were waning short and feeble.

"There!" said Maria, rising and holding back the curtains: "there they go, George—the bride and bridegroom; and now come the

others. We can say 'God bless them,' though we cannot be there." Her soft eyes were full of tears, and the patient lines of her mouth were quivering.

George raised his head feebly, but he did not raise himself, and he did not catch any glimpse of the fluttering robes. He fell back wearily.

"God bless them!" he said faintly, "if a blessing from me is not unlucky. I hope they will be happy!"

"I am sure of it," said Maria.

"That is a wide declaration," rejoined the invalid. "There seems nothing but suffering and sorrow in the world: and if some of us do bring them upon ourselves, they fall also upon the most innocent. You remember my telling you of the marriage of Morna McOrist—the daughter of the farm at Ragan, Maria?"

"Yes, you told me quite lately," answered Maria.

"And now she is very ill; strangely, sadly ill," George added, lowering even his low voice. "She is losing her mind."

"O, how terrible!" cried Maria, in startled sympathy with the unhappy Highland bride. "Is there any cause for it, George? Has the marriage been unfortunate?"

"They say the young husband is nearly wild with grief," went on George; "so wild, that sometimes they almost fear for his reason, too. Maria," he added, "there is something very strange about Morna McOrist's ravings."

"Young Mrs. Smith, you mean," said practical Maria, simply. "Is she so ill as actually to rave, George?"

"Well, not as you may understand raving," returned her brother. "They say she goes about quietly, whispering to herself concerning a dark pool, with a dead body in it."

"What?" gasped Maria, turning hot and cold.

George resumed his weird narrative in a low whisper.

"The madness, as they tell me, of Morna McOrist—that pure, innocent Highland girl—is that. She bears about with her the imaginary remorse of an imaginary murderer."

"What can it possibly mean?" exclaimed Maria. "You say the Dark Pool!—George," she rapidly continued, as an idea struck her, "is it possible that you have written to your friends an account of the mystery connected with the Black Pool here?"

He shook his head.

"Because, if so," went on Maria, "your friends would naturally relate the story to the McOrists; it would be quite an event in that dreary district; and—if the young wife's mind was in a weakened state, she might seize unduly upon these terrible images."

"I have not written a word upon the subject; I have never mentioned it," replied George.

"Can they have read it in the papers?" said Maria.

"Few papers reach the solitudes of Ragan," answered George.

"Besides, the news that the papers put in was the finding of Allan's body: whereas Morna McOrist's delusion appears to be that someone is still buried within the depths of the pool."

"George, are you *sure* you never wrote about it?" pursued Maria, who could not help thinking her idea must be correct. "Otherwise the coincidence is almost too singular to be believed."

Her tone, though decided, was low and wondering. George had fallen into thought. Maria fancied he might be trying to recall what he had or had not written. It was not so, however; he was rapidly making up his mind to a confession.

"No, Maria," he said, looking up at her. "My letters to Rose never contained a word of the sort. If they had, it might have made her anxious and uneasy."

A moment's wondering pause, and then Maria's eyes fell over her work. Her face was turning almost as white as her brother's. Rose! Who was Rose? She felt that he had spoken purposely and deliberately. She would not answer.

"Maria," said George again, wistfully, "you do not ask who Rose is. Don't you care to know?"

Maria hastily approached the sofa where he lay, and knelt down beside it. "Of course I care, my darling brother," she whispered. "Only—do you care to tell me?"

"I have been a foolish idiot," George burst out with more energy than she could have believed he possessed. "I ought to have told you at the first, and let you do whatever you thought right in the matter, and to have stood my chance like a man! Rose is my wife! I have been married nearly a year!"

Maria was so alarmed at her brother's agitation in his weak state, that she did not feel all the shock which this announcement might otherwise have given her.

"George, be calm," she implored. "Tell me all quietly. Is she —Rose—staying with the Foresters?"

"She is Mrs. Forester. I was the artist, Mr. Forester, at Redbourne," said George, with a wild kind of laugh. "But I married her in my right name, though she heard it for the first time only the evening before the wedding. You will have to be patient with her, Maria. She is a good enough little thing—poor little soul!"

What a pathetic commentary on the thoughtless Redbourne romance!

"I saw her at the Redbourne Inn—that was her only home," he went on, forlornly. "I knew what my aunt and uncle would say to such a marriage. And she ran away, innocent little simpleton, and came to London after me."

And then, pausing a few moments to recover calmness, George Vivian related the history of the past in detail. He had sent his wife to Ragan as a refuge and a hiding-place for her, until he saw his way clear to disclose all to the General. That time had not yet come,

and Rose was at Ragan still, living with the McOrists. He told of the little child, who had come into the world prematurely and had died at his birth. He also said that he himself had not been to Ragan during his wife's stay there. On his visits to Scotland she had met him at Edinburgh, or elsewhere.

When George's voice had ceased, Maria did not make any comment. She was at the window, dreamily gazing upon the trees below.

"Is the name Rose or Rosa?" she asked. "You call her both."

"She was christened Rosa. But her friends call her Rose."

"Your wife must be sent for, George," she went on presently, turning to him.

"But what about my aunt and uncle?"

"I must tell them," she sighed, for she did not like the task.

And Maria went forth at once to do it, for she saw that no time must be lost—George's hours were numbered.

"And this is the grand thing I have made of my life!" groaned George, when she was gone. "What shall I leave behind me? Well, perhaps a beacon to warn others from the rock where I foundered; the terrible, slippery rock of wandering heedlessly on the sunniest road, and doing what seems the pleasant or the easy thing, instead of the right and straightforward. I took no thought for the morrow; and now the morrow has come and will take no further thought for me! Poor child!" he added, thinking of his wife; "better perhaps that I had sent her back at once from London to her home at Redbourne, instead of marrying her! Still, I did that for the best; I did it for her, not for myself. Well, well, God sees all things: our shortcomings and our pain and our repentance: and He is ever merciful."

Maria got through her painful commission, as people always get through whatever they set their will to front. She did not choose to record in her memory the General's first angry outburst: she passed by without mental note Mrs. Vivian's one characteristic scornful comment on the young person who had taken in careless George. Both of them mentally recognised the right thing to do now, and they did it.

A telegram was despatched that evening to Mrs. Forester, at Ragan, without loss of time.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE YELLOW WOMAN.

Maria Vivian had gone bravely enough through the ordeal of telling the General and her aunt of the secret mésalliance of their heir, her brother. Somehow, she felt a far more painful shrinking when she found that the truth was leaking out among the servants. But it had to be borne. And Maria wore a calm, impassive face as she issued

her orders for the preparation of certain apartments "for Mrs. George Vivian, my brother's wife, who is coming from the Highlands."

That was how she briefly described Rose, and such a description excited much speculation. Was "the Highland wife," as the servants called her, "a native?" Would she arrive with tartan skirts and bare feet? Of course it was of no use to hope there was nothing queer about it, sighed the older servants, who were sincerely sorry. "Gentlemen did not hide wives they were proud of; and Mr. George was always random and thoughtless, though never doing harm, bless him, to anybody in the world."

Maria herself wrote a brief note of explanation to the Palmers; not wishing that friends, such as they were, should hear of so important an event from rumour. "George is very ill," Maria added: though of course the Doctor knew that. But it was her one little appeal for pity and tolerance for her brother.

The rumour flew to Moorland House; and it hurt Mary Anne Grale to the quick. She had posed far too vigorously as the cynosure of George Vivian's eyes (she alone knew on what slender grounds!) to bear with equanimity any such announcement. Mrs. Grale felt the blow also, for her daughter's sake; for Mary Anne's implicit belief in George Vivian had infected herself. Now, with a delicacy of feeling for which she might not have received credit, she would not allude to its special significance to Mary Anne; she never offered a word of sympathy, or let it be noticed that she saw how completely mistaken Mary Anne must have been.

Mary Anne Grale had now the explanation of that shopping scene in London, which had so puzzled her. George Vivian had been simply buying seasonable gifts for his hidden wife.

"A married man who passes as a bachelor is a far worse swindler than a poor man who tries to pass as a rich one," declared Mary Anne, in her anger. And George Vivian himself, draining the cup of remorseful humiliation, would have been the very last to contradict her.

Mrs. Grale did not answer. "If Mary Anne has been very near making a simpleton of herself, then the less said about it the better," thought she.

Yet she could not help joining in Mary Anne's next sarcastic remark—that the Vivians were not, it seemed, to escape calamities from the hand of Providence, however they might elude the rightful punishments of the law. Of course, in Miss Grale's sight, George Vivian's delinquency increased the certainty of his brother's guilt.

"Look at the power of deception and concealment which evidently runs in their very blood!" she cried to her mother.

"Ay," said poor Mrs. Grale. "He is flourishing unscathed, and my poor boy is lying under the sod!"

Lady Laura Bond wrote to her kinsman, Viscount Rockford.

"If you wish to urge your suit on the fair lady who charmed you

so much when you were here, you had better come again. If, as some people thought, though I never believed it, she had a tendresse for George Vivian, now is your time to take her heart at the rebound. He has gone and made the most ridiculous marriage, as perhaps you have heard—and is dying besides, poor silly fellow! A union with Mary Anne Grale will have its drawbacks, no doubt; but she is rather a nice girl on the whole, and will improve wonderfully in a refined atmosphere, and she'll be immensely rich, so I don't see that you can do better. Indeed, I think you will be lucky to get her."

Mrs. Grale, at this period, had a matter-of-fact trouble in the forthcoming departure of her favourite attendant, the parlour-maid, Susan, who was now on the verge of marriage with young Massey, the railway employé in London.

"Susan has been through a great deal with me," said Mrs. Grale, "and it's that which binds people together. I don't know how often we've talked over that afternoon when Edgar Vivian left the note, and when Alny went away. I dare say we might both have been better employed. But an end comes to everything, and when it comes, it's all for the best. So before Susan goes, I'll have poor Alny's room turned out and all his little matters put away. There's no need to hold up all the old story before a new servant's eyes. What people don't see, they don't think over—that's my belief. When one's son has died in a patched shirt and coarse stockings, there's no good in making relics of his fine cambric and hand-knit."

So Alny's drawers were emptied. His few books—some trashy novels, and one or two works on natural philosophy—were taken from the bracket and stored away in that cupboard of the old nursery, which had long contained the discarded toys of his childhood. Two or three photographs—one of George Vivian, one of a celebrated jockey, and another of a fashionable "beauty," were removed from the mantelpiece. Then Susan took up the little "calendar," by which she had known and testified to the date of Edgar Vivian's call at the house and subsequent events.

"I'd almost think the mistress would like to keep this," mused Susan, who had the morbid tastes too common among her class. "I'd rather like it myself, seeing that it was the day I wrote my first love-letter."

Nobody, since then, had altered or touched this simple calendar. Susan proceeded to examine its mechanism, which was, however, a little more complicated than such things usually are. But she got the little case opened at last, and drew out that card, "Tuesday, the twentieth," which had been fraught with such direful consequences.

But as she looked at the card, which had come out with other cards, she uttered a cry and dropped the calendar. The girl's ruddy face turned pale as death.

For on this card there was printed something else, a word which she had not before seen, and the word was "August!" The terrified

servant saw, as she believed, that she had all along been mistaken as to the date, and had sworn wrongly. Taking the calendar in her hand, she went into the room of her mistress, who sat there talking with Mr. Grale.

"Oh, ma'am!" she wailed, her face pale and her lips trembling; "Oh, sir! see what a mistake I made. That dreadful day, which I swore to as the twentieth of October, turns out to have been the twentieth of August!"

"What do you mean, girl?" angrily demanded Mr. Grale.

"That is, sir, I mean the card was for August," explained she, feeling utterly bewildered.

Mrs. Grale felt nearly as much so. "Was the twentieth of August on a Tuesday last year?" she asked her husband.

He walked heavily across the room, and consulted an old almanac.

"No," he sternly answered. "Don't bring any of your foolish fancies here again," he added to Susan.

The girl shrunk, cowed, from the presence of her master and mistress, the extraordinary calendar borne in her hand.

"I'm too forward with my tongue, I suppose, as people say," thought she, "and master's that hasty when he's put out, there's no standing before him. But I should like him to explain this puzzle if he can. I can't."

Yet the puzzle was a simple one. Susan had by mistake taken up a card for August, and mentally appended a wrong date to it unconsciously; the date which had held so great a hold upon her mind.

Maria Vivian drove down to Dering station to receive poor Rose at the end of her long and dreary journey from the wilds of Ross-shire. Those of the villagers who saw Miss Vivian pass along in the Court carriage, guessed what her errand was.

"Had I foreseen this day in all its details, I should have said that I hould not be able to bear it," thought Maria, as she alighted. She would not remain in the carriage: the young wife must see her the moment the train drew up. She would not go into the little waiting-room, she felt too restless, but walked up and down the narrow platform. An autumn chill was in the air, and there were autumn tints on the trees. Maria drew her mantle about her, but she did not lower her veil: the cool breeze was grateful to her tear-fevered face.

"She is sure to come, I think; she must not fail!" thought Maria, anxiously. If she failed she was little likely to see her husband in life. The painful excitement caused by the revelation of his humiliating secret, had cost George Vivian dear. His minutes were numbered. He might even be gone before Maria could regain the Court.

A faint rumbling in the distance. The train was coming. Now it was in the station. It had scarcely stopped before a slight girl stepped

out. She might have fallen in her haste, but that a watchful porter was ready with a helping hand.

Maria the sister and Rose the wife knew each other without a word of explanation.

"Is he?—how?" gasped the girl, all excitement. But Maria had the self-command of her breeding. She drew Rose's hand through her own arm, clasping the hand warmly. Then she quietly gave the direction to her footman. "Look after Mrs. George Vivian's luggage," before she answered the girl's breathless question.

"George is living yet," she said. "I see you were fearing the contrary; and I hope he will know you. But you must be very calm and still for his sake; it would be so sad if we had to fear afterwards that we had shortened his life by one half hour. I have come alone to meet you. My brother Edgar would have accompanied me, but that he remained with George. Here is the carriage."

When within its shelter Maria kissed her, and they drove away. They were not likely to have noticed—even without the gathering darkness—a black-robed figure that stood behind the palings, peering among the bushes, with a white resolute face. It was only that strange woman, Miss West, who had ever been so watchful of the railway-station. But as the carriage drove off, and she stepped from her retreat, why did she clasp her hands towards Heaven and say:

"Thank God!"

The heart of all Dering was with the Court that night. Even the dullest sensibilities could realize enough of the trouble being enacted there, to be stirred thereby. George Vivian, with his gay spirits and his kindly ways, had ever been a favourite. More than one faithful soul among his village acquaintances waked in the night watches, and lay wondering whether the young Squire's soul had yet taken its departure from among them. Old wives whispered to their good men of omens and death-tokens; others, with their thoughts turned to solemn things, spoke of their own dear dead, or turned over pathetic stories of youthful folly and mature suffering.

Next morning, the question each asked the first outsider he encountered was: "Do you know if he is gone?"

Yes, he was gone. Gone, with little more than one bright glance, one feeble hand-pressure for the foolish little wife who had waited so obediently and had come so far. George Vivian had passed away in those hours, between night and morning, when it seems as if the veil between the worlds is lifted, so that spirits may slip to and fro.

Neither the General nor Mrs. Vivian ever saw George's wife. They only saw George's widow. It was Maria's wise foresight and persistent intercession which did that. She longed to give the poor girl the full peace of the last hour with her husband—unchilled, unjarred by any cold look or petulant word.

That short vigil by her husband's deathbed was Rose's first experience of the comfort and luxury of the sphere to which she had

been elevated. And how she hated the rich carpets! How she loathed the carved furniture! Could anyone ever be happy among the stately appointments, which made the background for the bitterness of death in her life? Oh for the summer woods of Redbourne, and the chintz cushions and curtains of the cosy old parlour of her Uncle Joseph's house! Oh, even for the bare severity of her lonely chamber at Ragan farm, where, if she had not been quite happy, at least she had been hopeful and expectant.

And then it was all over.

They took her away to the chamber which Maria had caused to be got ready for her. They lighted a large fire on the wide hearth, for grief shivers. They brought her wine, for grief is faint. They spoke to her in gentle tones, they touched her with tender hands. As if in a dream she saw them all, those kind old servants. She saw Maria, too, coming and going; Maria was weeping; but she did not weep. She heard them say: "She would be better if the tears came."

Oh how lonely it was! They did not seem to like to leave her alone. As if she could be lonelier than she was in their presence!

She lay where they led her, on the sofa near the fire. A kind old woman, an ancient family servant, in a white cap and apron, went softly to and fro. Rose lay and watched her. She remembered a fever she had when a child. She had lain and watched her nurse then, and had felt just as she felt now—not sure what was real and what was fancy—not sure whether she was awake or dreaming.

There was a rap at the door. The old servant went and opened it, and a few sentences were exchanged outside. Then the old servant came into the room, and advanced softly towards her. What was to happen next? Rose lay motionless, as one spell-bound.

"There's somebody wanting to speak with you, madam, my dear," said the old woman. "You ought not to be disturbed, we know, but Miss Maria says we are to hear your own wishes."

Young Mrs. Vivian half rose. She looked the question she seemed powerless to utter.

"The person says we are to tell you it is Mrs. Tree—Cicely Raynham that was," said the old nurse. She was faithfully carrying out her instructions, though they puzzled her, knowing as she did who was waiting with Maria outside the door of the young widow's room. None other than the yellow woman.

Rose sprang to her feet. "Cousin Cicely!" she cried, with a cry of mingled agony and rapture that was terrible to hear. In another moment she was clasped in the arms of that slight woman, who did not wear her yellow cloak to-day, but was clad in deep mourning.

"I've got you safe at last, child!" said this cousin Cicely.

Rose's face was buried on her shoulder. She was weeping freely now. The old familiar voice had unlocked the frozen heart-springs.

"I have been looking for you ever since you went away, Rose," said Cicely, as they were left alone and sat together on the sofa.

"Oh!" exclaimed Rose, sobbing.

"It was Uncle Joseph," explained Cicely, who was really Mrs. Tree. "He would not rest, he could not rest, lest shame had come to you, child. We could not trace you; but some one mentioned to us a rumour he had heard, that the gentleman who had called himself Mr. Forester was really a Mr. Vivian; and we believed that you had gone away either with or after Mr. Forester. By dint of enquiry we got to know that a family of rank, named Vivian, lived at Dering, and I came off in pursuit of you, keeping myself, so far as I could, secret."

"Do you mean that you came here?" gasped Rose.

"Yes. And no sooner was I here than I was baffled. I heard a rumour that Mr. Vivian was supposed to be engaged to a young lady named Grale; I did not know him by sight, never having seen Mr. Forester, and a little circumstance led me to think that it was this young lady's brother, Allan Grale, who had been at Redbourne as Mr. Forester, and not Mr. Vivian. Still I did not know. I watched them both, here and sometimes in London, hoping to see you with one of them. If by good chance I could hear either of them was going to take a journey, I tracked them to the railway stations. I called myself a seamstress, in the hope of getting employment at Moorland House or here at the Court, that I might, if possible, pick up a stray word of news of you. I could not help thinking, you see, that you were living in concealment at Dering, or in its neighbourhood. But I never tracked you, Rose, never: I could hear nothing, and I suspected the worst. If George Vivian ——"

"Oh, Cicely, Cicely! don't blame him!" sobbed Rose. "He is dead, and nobody and nothing here can be anything to me. This place is only where he looked at me and died! Take me away to Redbourne, where he and I were so happy! Take me back to Uncle Joseph. I know uncle will forgive me: George always said he would. I thought so, too. I was not so sure of you, Cicely—and yet see how kind you are!"

Cicely's own eyes were full of tears now. She had to reveal a sorrow which they could share, as Cicely did not quite feel she could share Rose's grief for George Vivian.

"Poor child," she said, gently, "poor child! The world is full of change and loss. Many things happen in a few months, Rose."

Rose drew herself away from her cousin, and sat upright, with wide-opened eyes and mouth.

"What has happened, Cicely?" she asked blankly.

"He forgave you, dear; Uncle Joseph forgave you. You remember how bad his rheumatism always was—and they say his heart got affected. And—he died, Rose, early in the summer."

"Uncle Joseph dead!" gasped Rose, her tears checked by this new shock. "And the Ash-tree—and the old parlour!—it has been before my eyes all this last night."

"There are strangers in the Ash-tree," sadly answered Cicely, "and they have furnished it all anew. You would not know the old place."

Rose dropped again her head on her cousin's arm. "Take me back to Ragan," she cried. "He had seen Ragan and he had liked it. Take me away from this cruel place where he died. Take me back to Ragan, Cicely, before it changes too!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

A JOURNEY NORTH.

Rose felt very miserable at Dering Court during the melancholy days which succeeded George Vivian's death and preceded his funeral. She could not make herself at home with any of its inmates, not even with Maria, though all tried to be kind to her.

The poor old General, sorely shaken by his favourite nephew's loss, could not be too punctiliously considerate concerning Rose. He feared lest some manifestation of pride and high-handedness on his part had tempted George into the secrecy of his marriage. But Rose shrank from the old gentleman despite all his pathetic courtliness; she shrank from Maria, too; she shrank from everybody but her own cousin Cicely. She could not even bear the attendants to come about her. She refused the simplest service, except when Cicely was there to render it. So the latter was allowed to come to the Court, and be with her for some hours every day.

"Poor young person!" said Mrs. Vivian to Maria. "I do not think she is at all extraordinary. Probably we should all feel just the same, if only we were blessed with blood relations capable of lighting fires and making perfect beef-tea."

Rose's one cry was that she might be taken back to Ragan—the home her dead husband had found for her—the place which had so won his heart during his brief visit to it. She had made friends there: the McOrists and their "people" had been kind to her, and now the affliction which had recently befallen the newly married daughter of Ragan farm had made it a house of sorrow, with whose chastened spirit her own would be in harmony. Rose had been a comfort to the old people in their distress, and she wanted to be so still.

Even before George was laid in the family grave, Maria Vivian had recognised that some such plan must be devised. Rose would never be at home among the refinement and luxury which in her foolish girlhood she had coveted. She would be out of place at Dering Court; and in truth they should feel out of place with her, though they would all be cautious not to show it. Her strong wish, therefore, to return to Ragan, was acceded to readily.

General Vivian informed her in kind, delicate language, that he

should at once settle upon her a sum of money, which would bring her in a comfortable yearly income, and named the amount. It seemed very large to Rose; would be absolute wealth at such a place as Ragan. She protested with tears that she could not spend so much; she begged the General to lessen it by one half. But he would not. "It is a suitable and proper sum, my dear," he said, "and will be paid to you in quarterly instalments."

And the last doubt as to the wisdom of her retirement to so remote a solitude was dispelled when her cousin announced her willingness, indeed her desire, to share this exile with her.

For the "yellow woman" had been passing through much trouble herself, and a solitary place was more welcome to her than a crowded one. Close upon Rose's departure from Redbourne, Cicely had married John Tree, to whom she had been long engaged. He was captain of a merchantman, and when they had been married just a week, he had to leave her and embark again. From that voyage he did not return, and never would; fever had carried him away when off the coast of China. Cicely was longing for the rest and quiet of Ragan almost as much as Rose.

So, amid the falling leaves, they laid George Vivian to rest with his fathers in the "Vivian Ground" in Dering churchyard. As the mourners stood round the open grave, the valley below was nearly hidden from their eyes by the delicate autumn mist. The scenery of that funeral day had not the distant hills and the faint sea line on the horizon. These were there, but they were out of sight. The landscape seemed to end with the churchyard hedge, and a few yards of bare field beyond; just as George's life, which had once shown rare promise and prospects, seemed suddenly bounded by the deep grave and a few bitter-sweet memories.

And when those funeral rites were over, there remained no reason for any further delay in Rose's returning to her longed-for retreat. Nay, there was reason for haste. For letters came from Ragan, announcing that her friend Morna, her mind still darkened by a terrible shadow, was fast descending to the grave. "Change and loss are everywhere, as you say, Cicely," sighed Rose: "let me see Ragan once more before they have entered there."

It was thought well that Edgar Vivian should accompany his brother's widow back to Ragan; when he would explain anything to the McOrists in regard to the past that needed explanation. The suggestion had come from Edgar himself, but the General warmly seconded it.

On the day after the funeral the party started. All that Rose Vivian ever saw of Dering, she saw as she drove through it with Edgar to the station, where Cicely would join them. She saw a vision of ancient trees and sweet cottages, and murmured once: "How lovely!" But she but longed to be away from it all. It was not associated with love, with happiness, only with parting and death.

The travelling party did not pass many people on the road to the station. They only encountered one vehicle. It was a ruinous cart, drawn by a slow, stout horse, so eccentric in movement that his driver discreetly brought him to a standstill while the carriage passed. This was the equipage of Mittens, going on his collecting rounds. But it had other freight than its usual bags and bundles. Seated on the cart on one of these was Mary Letts and her boy. Edgar Vivian knew them again. Mittens touched his hat as the carriage whirled by. The lad looked out.

"That's the young gentleman for whose continued existence in this world I am responsible," remarked Edgar to his companion, willing to attract her attention to anything which might tend to slacken the tension of her feeling. "Did you notice what a start his mother gave when she saw me? I thought she was going to jump out of the cart."

Mrs. Tree was already at the railway station. In a few minutes they were all seated in the comfortable carriage, and poor Rose was beginning to retrace the journey she had made in such sore haste but a few days before.

The sorrowful little group had a very solemn journey. They only made two brief pauses. Rose was anxious to find herself once more where there seemed some sort of place for her, and the nearer she drew to her destination, the more eager and anxious did she become. What if she should arrive to find Morna as near death as she had found George?

At last they reached the point where they must leave even the Highland railway behind, and proceed by carriage. Edgar Vivian had never been so far North, and he was not very familiar with the scenery of the peculiarly wild character in which he presently found himself. One mountain defile opened into another; mountains lay piled on every hand, quartz peaks gleaming in rivalry with snow-caps, while fantastic forms of ridge and rock suggested weird legends of toiling troll or enchanted Titan. Here and there nestled little nooks of softer beauty—dainty groups of birch or fir, growing on the banks of crystal streams, fed by leaping cataracts and spanned by picturesque bridges.

For some time the horses had been toiling up-hill. Mrs. Tree had remained in the carriage, but Rose and Edgar had left it to walk up the steep hill, and were now some distance in front of it. Suddenly Edgar caught a silver gleam on the horizon.

"It must be the loch at last," he cried.

"We shall see Ragan in a moment," said Rose, softly, "we have some time to drive yet. But stop! Surely this is Colin Vass coming to meet us!"

Though Edgar had never seen the Highlandman before, he saw something in his face which told him that Colin had come to meet sorrow, bearing a sorrow of his own—a sorrow newly lifted, which

all his Spartan fortitude scarcely knew yet how to bear. Rose saw it too: for there was scarcely an interrogation in her cry of:

"Morna!"

"She is at peace," said the Highlander, solemnly. "God cleared the clouds from her soul with the light of His own countenance scarce two hours ago. But the house of the McOrists stands desolate, and the heart of Morna's husband is nearly broken!"

"Where is he?" asked Rose.

Colin shook his head, as he answered: "He is a stranger among us: he will not let us come near him. His grief is not as our grief. It has made us rivers of water: it has made him a rock of stone."

"He is as I was," cried out Rose, "until my cousin came—one of my own people."

"He says he has no people," returned Colin; "he has always said so. But at least he has a nation—the English—and the English tongue will come kindly to his dulled ears," added the Highlander, looking wistfully at Mr. Vivian.

"Where is he?" asked Edgar.

"At the hotel," replied Colin, pointing to a neat building, nestling in a scanty wood near the river. "Morna died in her childhood's bed and in her mother's arms; but directly the life had departed, Mr. Smith, her husband, turned silently away and went back to his own place, where he has shut and barred himself in his room."

"I will go and seek him," said Edgar, willingly. "I will try what a fellow-countryman can do for this poor young fellow. Perhaps I had better go to the hotel at once."

The carriage came up as he spoke, and Colin took Edgar's place, to conduct Rose and Mrs. Tree to the farm.

"Let us hasten," said Colin to Rose. "The daughter's seat is empty in Ragan. The heart of the childless mother will be warmer than ever to the childless widow."

As soon as Edgar Vivian's errand was understood at the hotel, and that he had come to offer comfort to the desolate mourner, willing hands and eloquent Gaelic tongues directed him to the chamber where poor Mr. Smith sat in his despair.

Edgar laid his hand gently on the handle. Colin was right: the door was secured within. He hesitated for a minute, and then spoke.

"Will not Mr. Smith let a countryman from the south say a friendly word to him?"

Edgar did not expect that a heavy tottering step would so instantly and hurriedly cross the room. The lock flew back; the door opened; and Edgar Vivian saw ——

(*To be concluded.*)

AUNT PARADOX.

LOUNGING over a late and nearly untasted breakfast in his chambers at the Temple, sat Richard Damer, Barrister-at-Law. His head ached, for he had taken more wine than was good for him the night before. It was not a failing he was given to very much, only now and then; he always hated himself for it the next morning, and he was now taking grave counsel with his better instincts and saying it should not happen again.

While thus sitting, a visitor came bustling into the room after a hasty knock. He was a tall and slender man with a pleasant face, though not one that could be called handsome, bright hazel eyes and bright brown hair. Richard Damer was short, slight, and fair; in fact, rather insignificant. His best friend could not say he was imposing in appearance.

"At breakfast now!" exclaimed the new-comer. "You are late this morning, Damer."

"And you early," returned Damer. "Something new for you to be out at ten o'clock, isn't it, Ryde?"

George Ryde laughed. "Not at all: only I don't come troubling you busy professional men at that hour," he answered.

"Busy!" ejaculated Damer, in allusion to his usual briefless condition. "Well, what have you come for now?"

"I am thinking of running down to Brighton for a couple of days, and I've come to see if you will go with me—just for a whiff of sea-air."

"Can't to-day," replied Damer.

"Why not? What are you going to do to-day?"

"Turn over a new leaf."

"Oh! Apropos of what?"

"Things generally."

"Any wonderful cause on at Westminster, in which you are to lead?"

He put the question gravely, as though he meant it, and then both the young men laughed. Richard Damer's day for "leading" in any great cause had not yet dawned.

"I came back here only the day before yesterday, after three days' absence," remarked the barrister. "My uncle is dead; I went down and stayed of course for the funeral."

"Dead! What Mr. Damer of Hartley Manor! I have not seen it in the papers."

"No, I shall send it in to-day. There was nobody down at Hartley to act in any way until I got there, which was the day before the funeral, so I left it until I should be back in town. His lawyer and

man of business, who has done everything for him, happened to be away this week, or I should have been sent for before, and the servants are just now incapable, half paralysed at the death of their master—which was sudden."

"I hope you come into his property, Richard?" said Mr. Ryde, in a low, feeling tone—for he knew how momentous the question was.

"To his entailed property I do, as a matter of course: I thought you knew that. To Hartley Manor that means, and about fifteen hundred a year. But as to the rest of his property, and it's a great deal, I can't say anything, for we cannot find the will."

"Did he make one?"

"Yes. Two wills in fact. He made one ten years ago, and that we found in an old disused cabinet. He made another last year. The butler tells me he was called in by his master to witness it, and did so in the presence of the lawyer, old Stephon, and Stephon's clerk. That will cannot be found in the house, so we think that Stephon must hold possession of it, and will produce it on his return. I hope it may prove so."

"Your tone is a doubting one, Richard."

"Well, the curious thing is, that when old Stephon was apprised of my uncle's death—he is in Ireland on business—he wrote back to say it was impossible for him to be home in time for the funeral, that it must of course take place without him; and the will, he added, would be found in the small cabinet in the library."

"And the will was not there?"

"No. Many private papers of Uncle Charles's were there, but not the will. I, the butler, and Stephon's head clerk—a respectable man who has been with the lawyer for thirty years—examined every place we could think of, but no will turned up. Thus things remain until Stephon's return."

"And—if it's not found?—if the old will has to be acted upon?" spoke George Ryde in a low tone.

Mr. Damer slightly shrugged his shoulders. "In that case I do not take more than I've got—the entailed estate. But yet, though, I suppose I should," he added, after a moment's thought. "In the old will the bulk of the money was left to a bachelor cousin of my uncle's and his most intimate friend; but the cousin has been dead these two years, so it is a lapsed legacy. I and Mary would come in for it between us, I reckon, as my uncle's next of kin. I hope and trust Aunt Paradox would not get any of it!" he broke off, in a different tone. "She takes too much as it is."

"Who in the world is Aunt Paradox? and why does she take too much?" lightly asked Mr. Ryde.

"Because she does not deserve it," replied Richard Damer. "As to who she is, to begin with, she is not any aunt of mine, or of Mary's either. She was once Eliza Lowe, a distant relative of my uncle's wife, and she married an elderly man, Major Paradox, who

died pretty soon and left her very slenderly provided for. Putting her boy and girl to a cheap preparatory school, she wormed herself into Uncle Charles's house, as companion to his wife, whose health was then beginning to fail, and whom she invariably called 'Cousin Jane.' She played her cards well at the Manor; was crafty, underbred, unscrupulous, and very sweet upon both, getting complete sway over the two. I believe they grew to look upon it that they had nothing less than a Peri within their gates."

"*You* did not, at any rate," laughed Mr. Ryde.

"I! Oh, I neither did nor didn't; I was only a careless schoolboy then. I had her character from Uncle Charles of late years. She made me and Polly call her Aunt whenever we were staying at the Manor, and it grew into a habit, but she is no aunt of ours."

"Pray are 'Mary' and 'Polly' one and the same individual."

"Quite so, and my little sister. A nice child, Ryde!—years and years younger than I am. It's a shame, though, she should be under the care of Aunt Paradox."

"Does the Aunt Paradox still live at Hartley Manor?"

"Not she. I left my tale unfinished. After poor Aunt Charles's death, she assumed by soft and imperceptible degrees all the airs and graces and the control also of the Manor's mistress. She very nearly gained the post she was then working on for—that of second wife to its master. But he found her out in time—all her craft and her worthlessness, and he shut up the Manor for a spell, quietly telling her she must return to her own home, and went abroad for a season, and never believed in Aunt Paradox or her sweetness again. But in the will that he made after his wife's death, the will which, as I have told you, is still in existence, he left her five hundred a year for life."

"And how comes it that you let her have charge of your sister?"

"I can't help it; it was no doing of mine. My mother, a gentle, loving woman, believed in Eliza Paradox to the last; and she left Mary under her charge when she died. She couldn't leave her to me, I suppose, a bachelor knocking about in chambers; or to my Uncle Charles, as there was no mistress at the Manor; and she chose Aunt Paradox. So there it is. And I can't go to Brighton with you, Ryde; I must stay here to see to things and await old Stephon. He may turn up at any hour."

About a week passed on. Mr. Stephon had come back, and Richard Damer had gone down with him to Hartley Manor, which lay about twenty miles west of London. The lawyer did not hold the will; he said he never had held it; it had been placed by Mr. Damer himself in the small cabinet in the library as soon as completed; he, Mr. Stephon, was present and saw him lock it up securely: he had not since seen it. Every place, likely and unlikely, was searched, but it could not be found.

"Do you think my uncle destroyed it?" asked Richard Damer.

"No, I do not," said the lawyer: a stout, red-faced man with white hair and whiskers, who wore silver-rimmed spectacles. "It's not more than three or four weeks ago that he was talking about it to me—I'm sure it was all safe then. He felt inclined to make a slight alteration in the will, he said, by increasing the annuities left to Gatty and Mrs. Peat. In the will they stood, Gatty's at forty pounds per annum, the housekeeper's at thirty—as I have already informed you, Mr. Richard. Mr. Damer thought he should augment each of them by ten pounds. I feel sure he would have done it."

"Was anything left to Mrs. Paradox? I don't think you have told me that."

"Nothing at all. Nothing whatever."

A glow of satisfaction illumined young Damer's face. "Halleluia!" he breathed, irreverently.

"I told Mr. Damer that any such little alteration could be made by a short codicil, without disturbing the will," resumed the lawyer. "He answered that of course it could, and he would talk further with me the next time I came: he had only mentioned this when I was on the point of departing and I could not wait."

"And did he talk of it with you the next time?"

"No," said Mr. Stephon. "The next time I went down—about a week afterwards—I found him suffering from one of those sick headaches to which he was subject, and no business of any kind was entered upon. That was the last time I saw him. In a few days I was summoned in haste to Ireland, and he died the very evening of my departure. You are aware, I conclude," added Mr. Stephon, after a pause, "that a letter addressed to me, and ready for the post, lay on the table by his side when he was found dead?"

"Yes, I think Gatty told me so," replied Richard.

"Gatty posted the letter to me that same night, and my clerk forwarded it to me in Ireland. It contained only a few brief words—you shall see it—asking me to come down to him the following afternoon."

"About the codicil, do you think?"

"I have thought so. There was no other matter, so far as I know, that he could want me for just now."

"I wonder if he said anything to Gatty about it? He used to like to talk to old Gatty; put a goodish bit of confidence in him. I fancy lonely people do when a servant has been with them for many years. Here is Gatty, coming in with the tray," broke off Richard "Let us ask him."

The butler, a portly, respectable, honest man of five-and-fifty years, put his luncheon tray on the table. He was disposing the plates about when Richard spoke to him.

"Gatty, you remember that letter you found on the table by your late master's side? Did he say anything to you about it?"

"No, sir," replied the man. "My master seemed to be rather silent that evening—I did not notice it at the time, but remembered it later. He dined at six o'clock as usual, I waiting on him. By-and-by, when it was getting dusk, he rang for lights; it was a bit early for them, I thought. I lighted the lustres on the mantelpiece, and took in the two candles for the table: he never would burn any lights but wax, you know, sirs. While I was drawing down the blinds, he drew the two candles on the table close to him, as if intending to read, I thought, though I saw no book about. I was leaving the room when he called me back and said he would put on his dressing-gown, he should be more comfortable in it. I fetched the dressing-gown, his new one, a beautiful crimson silk. 'Not that,' says he, the moment he saw it, 'the old one.' So I brought the old one, and helped him to put it on, in place of his evening coat. 'This is getting very shabby, sir,' says I, as I was pulling the old purple cashmere thing round him and buttoning the band. 'So it is, Gatty,' master answers, 'but one is more at ease in old things than in new ones, however, we must soon hand it over to Robertson now;' for this old purple dressing-gown had been promised by master to Robertson, our late gardener, whenever it should be done with; Robertson having the rheumatics that bad he is unable to stir out for weeks together. So, that being all master wanted, I went back to my pantry ——"

"But about the letter, Gatty?" interrupted the lawyer in his sharp way.

"I was coming to the letter, sir," said the butler, who was just as slowly deliberate as the other was quick. "At eight o'clock I took in my master's cup of tea. While drinking it, he told me to put his writing desk on the table; I did so, and he opened it, and began spreading out his note paper and looking at his pens: by which I saw he was going to write. 'These candles don't give the light they used to, Gatty,' says he. 'Sir,' says I, taking leave to say it, 'I think it's our eyes that's in fault, not the candles; I know mine don't see as they did a few years agone. 'Ay, ay,' says he, with a sort of sigh, 'it's the same with us all, Gatty.' With that I left him. When ten o'clock struck and he had not rung, I thought I would go in to see if he was not ready for his small glass of wine and water: it was very rare that he had it in later than ten. And—and—you know the rest, sirs," broke off Gatty with a sort of sob. "My poor master was lying dead with his head upon the desk, which was shut up then, and his arms clasped round it as if holding on, and the letter, stamped, and directed to Mr. Stephon, was on the table."

"It is the disappearance of this will that is troubling us, Gatty," observed the lawyer, after a pause. "I cannot imagine what has become of it."

"I'm sure I can't, sir," returned the butler. "But Mr. Richard says there's another will, if that last one's lost."

"Yes, yes," testily cried the lawyer, "but you don't understand. There were some legacies bequeathed in this last will; one of them to you, Gatty. If the will can't be found, the legacies are void."

Gatty sighed. "Well, sir, we must take things as they come," he said, with resignation. "My master was very dear to me, and I shall at all events have the consolation of knowing that he did remember me."

"You won't suffer, Gatty, will or no will," said Richard Damer.

Again a few days went on. It appeared to be utterly useless to search further for the new will; the conclusion unwillingly come to was, that Mr. Damer had himself destroyed it; and Mr. Stephon made preparations for proving the old one, which must now be acted upon. By this will Mrs. Paradox came into five hundred pounds a year, and Richard Damer decided to go down into Norfolk to tell her of it.

"You may as well go with me, George," he said to his friend Ryde, the previous night. "There's an excellent village inn, clean and quiet, and I've written to the landlord to expect me."

"Don't mind if I do," answered the young man, whose time was his own, for he had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and was in no profession. "What place do you call it?—Barnham? Never heard of it."

"It has only about a score of dwellings in it, half of them cottages. Aunt Paradox has named hers 'Barnham Lodge.' We'll go down by an early train to-morrow. The country is very pretty about there—affords a fine field for you sketchers."

II.

Barnham Lodge was a little red-brick house, standing just beyond the village. It had a flower garden and lawn, a productive kitchen-garden and a poultry-yard surrounding it. Seated in the kitchen, scraping asparagus, was a fair, pretty girl, very intent upon her work. She wore a white cotton frock with blue spots upon it; spots as blue as her own clear blue eyes. Her sleeves were partly tucked up and her hands and arms were the delicate ones of a lady. May had just come in, the air was balmy, and the sun shone through the kitchen window right upon the girl's lovely golden hair.

At that moment two young men, who had left the train and ordered a porter to take their travelling bags to the village-inn, the "Plough," where they meant to put up, turned into the garden. On each side of the path that led up to the door was a flower-bed, in which appeared Spring's fragrant flowers. Richard Damer, who wore mourning, stooped to pick a small early rose, no bigger than a button. By the broad, white doorstep grew a huge cluster of the fragrant southernwood—not that everybody cares for its scent. He tried the front door, found it fastened, and was turning away.

"Why don't you knock?" asked Mr. Ryde.

"Not I; I'm not going to stand on ceremony with Aunt Paradox. We'll go round to the other door."

The other door was the kitchen-door, and stood open. Richard was at it first, and halted in silence; his friend behind him. The girl, busy with her asparagus, did not observe them, and they stopped a moment, looking at her. Just then a stout little ball of a woman with a soft, plump, yet shrewish face, entered from the house passage opposite.

"Now then, Mary, is that asparagus not done?" she called out, in shrill tones. "What an idle girl you are. You've ——"

In looking up, Mary Damer caught sight of the strangers. One moment of doubt, and then down went knife and asparagus upon the kitchen table, and her joyful arms were clinging to her brother.

"Oh, Dick, is it you! Aunt Paradox, it is Richard!"

"Dear me, and what if it is!—you needn't make a fuss over him," cried Mrs. Paradox, who never had a pleasant word for Richard, before his face or behind his back.

"How do you do, Aunt Paradox," said he, holding out his hand to her. "Allow me to introduce to you my friend, Mr. Ryde. George, this is my sister Mary. We have taken you by surprise," he added to the elder lady, who was surreptitiously smoothing down her morning gown and giving twitches to her light curls, which were fewer and scantier than they used to be—while Mary received the stranger with the sweet and kindly grace of a young princess.

"Indeed you have," said Mrs. Paradox, in answer to Richard's last remark—"coming into the house this way! There is a front door."

"We found it bolted, and came round to save trouble," said he.

"You would have been heard had you knocked. Hannah is only sweeping down the stairs. Will you walk this way now? You can come also, Mary: Hannah will finish that asparagus."

She led the way to the best sitting-room; a pretty room, well furnished. For Aunt Paradox had some good furniture which she had never parted with; and her own income was somewhat over two hundred pounds a year. One can live comfortably in a rural district upon that. They took their seats, and Richard Damer disclosed the news. Mr. Damer of Hartley Manor was dead ——

"Yes, I saw it in the *Times* nearly three weeks ago," she interrupted. "All that while ago, and nobody has had the common courtesy to write to apprise me of it."

Richard began to explain about the missing will. They had waited until that should be found, or else given up as lost, before apprising her. In the old will she took an annuity of five hundred pounds; in the ——

"I know I did," she again interrupted. "But I thought Charles Damer would probably have made a fresh will."

"As he had," said Richard. "But the new one cannot be found

and we suppose he destroyed it. Therefore the old one is to be proved, under which you take your five hundred a year."

Mrs. Paradox smiled softly and then heaved a sigh, as if the news relieved her of some heavy pain. All the sweetly insinuating manner of the by-gone days came up again.

"Well, it is good of you to bring me the news, Richard, and I thank you, though you did come in by the kitchen-door. Did I take the same annuity under the last will?"

"No. I believe your name was not mentioned in the last will, aunt. Mr. Stephon made it, and he will no doubt give you all particulars if you wish."

"Oh, I don't wish it, thank you. The will does not exist, so it's no matter what was in it. Are you returning to London to-day?"

"No. We are going to take the benefit of the country air for a few days. We shall stay at the 'Plough.' I wrote to the landlord yesterday. Is Arminia well, aunt?—and grown up into a beauty, as you used to predict?"

"Beautiful is hardly the name for her," returned Mrs. Paradox; "Arminia is more than beautiful. She will be at home this evening. She goes to the Ladies' College here by day, just for accomplishments."

"And you go also, I presume, Mary?"

Mary Damer coloured, hesitated, and looked at Mrs. Paradox.

"I have not sent Mary this term," said that lady. "And really she does not need it. She will never be clever at music, and her drawing she does at home. Will you take any refreshment?—and you, Mr. Ryde?"

They both declined, and left, promising to call later in the day. Arm-in-arm, they strolled towards the Plough.

"She's an old cat," remarked Richard, with suavity. "She has a good income paid her with my sister, and *pockets* it—except just what goes in the child's meat and drink. I can see."

"And puts her to scrape asparagus and shell peas," laughed George Ryde. "But I say, old fellow, how came you to talk of your sister as a child?"

"What else do you call her?"

"I should call her a young woman; and a very charming one too. How old is she?"

"How old? Oh, sixteen, I suppose."

"And the rest of it."

"The rest? let me see. Mary is nine years younger than I am, and I am twenty-seven. Why, if I don't believe the child must be eighteen. Eighteen next July. How time passes!"

They settled themselves comfortably at the Plough, an old-fashioned, sleepy village inn now, but one of some note in the old posting days. Towards evening they went out to call again upon

Mrs. Paradox. The sun was setting behind a distant hill, and the earth seemed bathed in golden light.

The two young girls stood at the gate, looking out over the narrow strip of common, perhaps looking out for them. Mary wore a black silk frock now ; her pretty neck and arms were bare, and she looked like the child Richard had called her.

Arminia was different. Arminia Paradox had never looked like a child when she was one. She took after her late father, the Major, who was tall, dark and upright. She had beautiful black eyes and purple black hair, and cheeks bright as a crimson rose. A very handsome girl indeed, of distinguished presence. Her light silk dress gleamed with richness.

" Mamma thought you would be coming," said she, with a brilliant smile, as she put her hand into Richard's.

" Why, how you have grown, Arminia ! " he exclaimed. " May I take a cousin's kiss ? " bending his head.

" No, of course not, sir—for shame ! " she answered, laughing and drawing back. " Richard, you are just the same tease that you used to be."

" I a tease ? never. You should see what Ryde is. I'm a sober judge of middle age compared with him."

Talking and laughing, they strolled about the lawn, and then round to the kitchen garden to see the lovely blossoms of the fruit trees. Arminia, walking by Mr. Ryde's side, invited him to go and look at the lilies of the valley, which were under the garden wall.

Richard drew his sister aside. They were passing a bench and he bade her sit down on it, and took his seat beside her. " Mary, I want to ask you a thing or two," he said. " I am your guardian, you know, though the mother did leave you to Aunt Paradox, so far as residence goes. How is it that you do not go to this college as well as Arminia ? "

Mary hesitated. She was very sweet-natured, and did not like to tell tales.

" You must answer me," said her brother, with authority.

" Aunt Paradox thinks I know enough, Richard. I have not gone there for twelve months."

" Oh ! You stop at home and do housework instead."

" I only help, Richard. When only one servant is kept in a house, she cannot do everything."

" Why does not Arminia do it, instead of you ? "

" Aunt Paradox wants Arminia to be very accomplished, as she is so beautiful."

" She may be accomplished, and welcome. But I fail to see, child, why you should not be accomplished also."

" I don't think I have any talent for fine accomplishments, as Arminia has. Mamma never cared about my music, you know : so long as I played softly and sang the old songs to her, she was

contented. But it is the expense, Richard; Aunt Paradox cannot afford it."

"Are you aware, my dear, that she receives a hundred and fifty pounds a year with you?" he asked, in a grave tone. "And thirty pounds besides for your dress. That last item she stood out for, and got it as an extra."

"Does she have extra for my dress?—I did not know that. I have been afraid to ask for a new frock: she says sometimes what a cost I am to her."

"How often do you have a new frock."

"Hardly ever. I had a good many when I came, besides my mourning. Aunt has them lengthened and done up for me. I assure you, Richard, she is very poor, and can hardly find money for anything."

"What does her money go in?"

"She has to send a good deal to her son, Clement, who often writes for it. Then Armine has so many new things; my aunt likes her to be dressed well."

Mr. Richard Damer drew in his lips. A nice state of affairs! thought he. And the fault is partly mine. A whole year this month since I came here to see after the child. Shame upon my negligence!

He said no more then; indeed she was not the right person to say it to. But he promised himself a speedy half-hour's interview with Aunt Paradox.

"I have to stay here until I am twenty-one, have I not, Richard?"

"Yes, my dear. Unless you cut short the term by getting married. You can do that."

"Oh, Richard!" she laughed, blushing. "Married! I! That is too good a joke."

"Yet it might happen, I suppose, Mary. But it could not happen without my consent. Understand that, young lady."

"Must my aunt give her consent also?" asked the girl, quickly.

"No. Fortunately. You are not in her power in any way, except as to residence. Why?"

"Because—because," hesitated Mary, dropping her voice to a low key, "one afternoon, when some of the girls were here from the college, we were playing at husbands and wives; it is a rather silly play. Each girl has to choose for her husband some character out of a romance. One girl chose the Master of Ravenswood, another chose Jack Sheppard, which made us laugh. I was choosing Moses Primrose in the Vicar of Wakefield, to make them laugh again, you know, when Aunt Paradox spoke up sharply, telling me I need not trouble myself to choose at all, for my future husband was fixed upon and waiting for me. I——"

"What did she mean?"

"I'm afraid she meant Clement. I fear she means me to marry

him when I am old enough; Armine says so; and oh, Richard, I can't bear him."

Richard Damer took his arm from beneath his sister's golden curls that were bending down upon it, stood up, and put his back against a tree, a terrible look of anger upon his face. It was a minute or two before he spoke.

"Is Clement Paradox here often?" he then asked, quietly.

"Oh, no, scarcely ever. He cannot get leave—and his regiment is over in Ireland now."

"And you can't bear him, Mary?"

"I can't, I can't," she answered, with a sort of sob. "But you must not tell that to Aunt Paradox—or to Arminia, either."

"My dear, you may put your little heart at rest in all ways," said Richard. "Nobody can marry you without my consent for many a year to come—not until you are five-and-twenty years of age in fact; and I shall never give that consent to Clement Paradox."

"Hush, please, Richard! They are coming back."

"One more word, my dear. How is it you have never mentioned any of these things to me in your letters?—about not going to school—about Clement ——"

"Oh, please hush, Dick! I can't; I've not been able to do so; Aunt Paradox always sits by me when I write my letters."

"How idle you are this evening, Damer!" exclaimed Mr. Ryde. "We have been all about everywhere."

"Hope you have enjoyed it," returned Richard. "Idleness is one of my besetting sins."

They were summoned by Mrs. Paradox, and went in. A sumptuous tea was spread upon the table. Hot buttered rolls, cake, and honey, potted meat, and preserved strawberries and cream, and tea and coffee. And Aunt Paradox was sweeter than the honey, and Armine witty and beautiful, and Mary shy and silent.

III.

THE days that ensued were pleasant, the weather was warm and light. Richard took an opportunity of treating Aunt Paradox to his opinion upon one or two subjects, but he might as well have let it alone. The past was past and its events could not be altered. She was all suavity, assuring her "dear nephew" that she and Polly were delightfully happy together; as to Mary's shelling peas, or anything of that kind again, why *of course not.* She, Aunt Paradox, was at her ease now as to money matters, her new legacy of five hundred a-year placed her so, and she should live accordingly, and keep an additional maid, who was already engaged. As to Mary, she had made arrangements for her to return *at once* to the college with Armine to pursue her music and drawing studies.

But that last item Richard negatived. Not while he was at Barn-

ham, he said; he wanted Mary himself, to go about with him in his walks, and so on. In a week or two, when he should have left, she might go back to college if she liked.

Accordingly, every morning after breakfast, or nearly every morning, Richard arrived to run away with his sister. Aunt Paradox did not altogether approve of these expeditions, but she had no power to stop them; Richard was higher in authority as to the guardianship than she was.

"She will get as sunburnt as possible," remonstrated Aunt Paradox, when Richard came the second morning. "Mary is one who tans frightfully."

"Oh, we don't mind that," said he. "It will make her look strong and healthy."

"Where are you going to take her this morning?"

"Where fancy leads me," said he, carelessly. "Don't know yet. Over to see the deer in Lord What's-his-name's park, perhaps."

"Will Mr. Ryde go with you?" questioned Aunt Paradox.

"Ryde?" repeated Richard, vaguely, as if he did not know the name. "Oh, he! Ryde goes off, sketching scenery. He is an adept at that."

"He is rich, is he not, that Mr. Ryde?"

"Very rich. Far better off than I am, with all Uncle Damer's money."

"And a gentleman by descent?"

"Quite," assented Richard again. "So you are here at last, Miss Mary! Hope you've taken your own time to put that straw hat on!"

It was a very pretty hat, and a very pretty face was blushing under its shade. They went away together, the brother and sister, Aunt Paradox standing at the door to look after them.

"That young Ryde will be the very *parti* for Armine," mused she: "and he cannot fail to fall convert to her beauty. I did once think of Richard for her, but I see he has turned out to be of a miserable disposition; one of those obstinate, antagonistic men who won't be led."

Walking away, in the full enjoyment of the balmy air, towards Lord What's-his name's park, they came upon Mr. Ryde, who was seated upon a low bank, sketching.

"This is the loveliest little bit of view possible," remarked he, as they sat down. "I dare say you know it already, Miss Mary."

"Yes; I sketched it myself once," she replied as he showed her his work. "But oh, not as you are doing it. I wish I could draw like this!"

"Do you take lessons?"

"Not now. Aunt Paradox thinks they are wasted upon me. I am not clever—as Armine is."

"Does Miss Paradox draw?"

"No; but you should hear her music. She plays and sings—oh, like a professional."

"Armine's grand at everything," put in Richard, who sat flinging stones into the little brook; "Mary is only a goose beside her. Never mind, child; you are clever enough for me."

The sketch was not finished that day, nor the next, nor the next. They all three aided at its progress each day; Mr. Ryde drawing, the other two looking on. The work was much hindered by intervals of conversation, and by strollings hither and thither. Richard, who was not at all a goose himself—on the contrary, rather deep, so far as reading Aunt Paradox went—charged Mary that she was not to say anything about the sketching intervals.

One evening, when Richard had stayed at home to write letters, he reached Barnham Villa only at the gloaming. Mary was in the parlour alone, her head bent down on the arm of the sofa, her face rather disconsolate.

"Where are they all?" asked Richard.

"Aunt Paradox is up in her room; she won't be long, I think."

"But Ryde? Where's he?"

"He and Arminia went for a walk together after tea."

"And why did you not go also?"

"Aunt Paradox would not let me," sighed Mary. "She said I had too much walking with you in the day-time. Armine said so too."

"Well, come with me now, Mary. We'll go and meet them."

Mary drew back. "I cannot," she whispered; "Aunt Paradox would be angry with me. She ordered me never, never to join Mr. Ryde and Armine; when they are together I am not to go within *yards* of them."

Richard Damer laughed softly for a full minute. He had suspected the policy of Aunt Paradox before; now he knew it openly. Well, if he was anything of a conjurer, she would find herself mistaken.

"What are you laughing at, Richard?"

"At Aunt Paradox, Mary. Never mind the why and the wherefore."

Two or three weeks went on, and the merry month of May was drawing to a close. It had kept up its character for lovely weather throughout, as if the seasons were returning to what they were in the days gone by. Aunt Paradox was somewhat surprised that the young men should stay so long, but put it down to the attractions of Arminia. Mr. Ryde said he was taking a series of sketches, and stayed to complete them: which Aunt Paradox regarded as only a figure of speech. She treated them to sumptuous teas—they all dined early—and after tea there would be charmingly romantic saunterings by moonlight.

"But he never speaks; he shows no special indication of coming forward as he ought," grumbled Aunt Paradox to herself. "Armine

says he is like an owl for sedateness whenever they are alone together."

Arminia had a little holiday just then, it being the middle of the summer term. On the first day, after dinner, she was sauntering in the shady walk at the side of the garden, humming snatches of the last new song, and not at all aware that Mr. Ryde was sitting on the other side of the trees completing a sketch. They had been with him there in the morning until he went home to dinner, but did not know he had hastened back again.

"Mary," called out the young lady to her cousin indoors, "just bring me my parasol. The pink one."

"I can't find the pink one anywhere," said Mary Damer, advancing with a green one. "Here's the other."

"Will they come over at all this afternoon, do you know?" asked Armine, as she put up the parasol.

"I don't know I'm sure."

"You never do know anything; you never take the trouble to know—as if you could not have asked Dick!" cried Miss Paradox reproachfully.

"I did not think to ask him, Armine."

"To be sure not. It would not be you if you had thought. I wonder how you'll get through life, Mary?"

Not being able to answer, Mary was silent.

"I expect you'll vegetate on here with my mother and grow into an old maid," said Armine loftily. "You have no fortune to speak of, as you don't take anything under Mr. Damer's will, just a hundred or two a year; and not possessing personal attractions to make up for it, the chances are you'll not marry at all. Mamma did think of you for Clement; but she and Dick have had a split upon the subject, so——"

"I would not have Clement if he were worth his weight in gold," said Mary, taking courage to say it for the first time in her subdued life. "Dick says he shall have me to live with him; I'm to keep house for him."

Armine tossed back her beautiful raven curls. "All talk, my dear. Dick will marry, now that he has come into his fortune. He won't have room for you."

"Shall *you* marry, Armine?" asked the girl, with a sigh.

"Why, of course I shall. What a silly question! Sooner than you suspect, perhaps. You shall come to London on a week's visit to me now and then, Mary, if you behave yourself."

"Then you will live in London?"

"Certainly—for part of the year. But I'm not going to say any more about it now, only don't you be surprised at anything that may happen," said Armine, sitting down on the bench under shelter of the trees. "You may go and fetch me a book that I've left on the drawing-room sofa, Mary"

Mary fetched the book, and then went indoors. By and by, when Armine grew tired of reading and of the solitude, she returned to the house, and found Mary seated at the table with some sketches before her. Mrs. Paradox sat at the open window.

"Did you do these?" asked Armine, looking at the sketches.

"Yes," said Mary.

"But they look fresh—as if recently done?"

"I have done them all since Richard came."

"You have improved, Mary."

"That is through Mr. Ryde. He has been taking great pains with me."

"Mr. Ryde has?" exclaimed Armine.

"What's that?" curtly demanded Mrs. Paradox, turning her head. "When has Mr. Ryde taken pains with you, pray?"

"All these mornings, when I have been out with Richard," replied Mary, simply. "While Mr. Ryde does his own sketches, he attends to me. It is very kind of him."

"Am I to understand that you—that you have been sitting side-by-side with George Ryde during his sketching excursions?" cried Mrs. Paradox, advancing with a severe countenance. "Am I to understand *that*, Mary?"

"Yes, aunt; I and Richard have been with him. Sometimes Richard would read to us."

Aunt Paradox pushed back her scanty flaxen hair. Words at first failed her.

"And you never told me of it, Miss Mary! You desperately deceitful little toad!"

Mary burst into tears; thrust her sketches into her portfolio, ran into the garden, and took refuge on the shady bench under the trees where Armine had been recently sitting. There she sobbed aloud.

"What is the matter, Mary?" presently cried a low and tender voice beside her. She looked up to see George Ryde. Hearing the sobs on the other side the trees, he came in at a little gate higher up, and sat down by her as he put the question.

Mary was ashamed to be caught giving way to her distress, and hastily dried her tears.

"It is nothing," she said. "Aunt Paradox scolded me. That's all."

"She scolds you pretty often, I fancy, Mary."

"Not often now. Not while Richard is here."

"Ah, what shall you do when we are gone? The scoldings will begin again in earnest then, won't they?"

"Oh, I'm afraid so. I hope Richard will have me up to live with him! He said the other day he would. He said he wanted me to keep house for him."

"But, my dear—Mary," said George Ryde, not quite so coherently

as usual, "what if somebody else wants you to keep house for him? What if *I* want you?—if I cannot spare you to Richard?"

He had taken both her hands in his, and caused her to turn her face towards him. Poor Mary never answered. Her eyes were cast down; her cheeks were burning.

"Will you be my wife, Mary? And come home to me, and keep *my* house? Will you be my dearly-loved wife for ever and for ever?"

"I have no fortune, to speak of," faltered Mary. "Armine says I must not expect to marry."

"And no personal attractions to make up for the want of fortune; and so you will have to vegetate here with Aunt Paradox and grow into an old ——"

"Oh!" cried the girl, blushing more than before, "you must have overheard!"

"To be sure. I was at the back of the trees there, filling-in my sketch. My little darling, my best-beloved! I shall take you away from this unkindness to a haven of happiness."

He bent her face down upon his breast and took his first kisses from it. He did it so masterfully that Mary could not hinder him, —and at last did not try to.

"What will Richard say?" she whispered.

"Richard said last night, when I spoke to him, that he would give Mary to me with all the pleasure in life, and the sooner I took her away the better."

Tea and the ladies had been waiting a quarter of an hour when the two got indoors. They had supposed Mary was sulking; Aunt Paradox said so; and to see her come across the lawn with George Ryde, surprised them much.

"Why, they are arm-in-arm! Do you see, Armine?—she has taken his arm! What a brazen child it is!"

And Aunt Paradox, who did sometimes forget her company manners when very much put out, met Mary with an angry reproach at her forward behaviour. George Ryde stood quietly to listen, keeping her on his arm.

"It is all as it should be, Mrs. Paradox. I have been extorting a promise from this young lady which gives her the right to my arm from henceforth. She has consented to be my wife."

A dead silence. The communication was too weighty to be answered lightly. It partially stunned Aunt Paradox.

"This comes of those sketching mornings!" she exclaimed, finding her tongue.

"Well, I suppose it has partly grown out of them," assented Mr. Ryde. "But I assure you I fell in love with Mary at first sight, when she was in the kitchen, scraping asparagus. I thought she had the sweetest face I ever saw."

Aunt Paradox knew very well on which side her bread was buttered;

she did not intend to offend Mr. Ryde, and smiled away her wrath. After awhile they began tea, thinking it useless to wait longer for Richard, and wondering much what had become of him.

Tea was nearly over when he came. He had been detained by letters, he said, bringing momentous news. The one letter, a short one, was from Mr. Stephon; the other one, which was long, came from the butler, Gatty.

The missing will was found. And as Gatty's letter gave the account of how it was done, which the lawyer's did not give, it is Gatty's letter that we must read:

Hartley Manor, 29th May.

Dear and Honoured Master,—This comes hoping you are well, sir, which it leaves me at present. The strangest thing has come to light, which it is no less than the lost will, and I am here sat down in my pantry to write you the particulars, sir, such being my duty. You must remember my late master's old purple cashmere dressing-gown, which he put on the night he died, and was promised to old Robertson when he should have done with it? We gave the gown to Robertson soon after you left us last, Mr. Richard, which you told me and Mrs. Peat we was to do, Mrs. Peat turning out the pockets first by my orders, but there was nothing in 'em. Robertson was fine and thankful for it, he was, saying 'twas too smart for him, and how good the old master was, but he have not had occasion to wear it yet on account of the warm weather. Last night, being chilly, he put it on, and down he sits upon something that felt hard. Putting his hand into the pocket, which is an inner one (and which Mrs. Peat must have missed), though the others is easy to find, he pulls out a big packet in a big strong envellop of parchment, on which was writ outside 'Will of Charles Damer, Esquire.' It was too late to come up, he'd have found us all shut up, but he says he couldn't sleep all night for trembling, and at breakfast time this morning he brought up the will. I locked it up, sir, in master's old safe, and wrote to Mr. Stephon by the early post, and now I'm writing to you, Mr. Richard. And I'm glad it's found, sir, and so is Mrs. Peat, for it's awkward to lose grave things out of a house, specially when them they belong to is dead, and I humbly beg to send my duty to you, Mr. Richard, and am your faithful servant to command, sir, Thomas Gatty."

Richard Damer read this letter aloud to the party at the tea-table. A dead silence ensued as his voice ceased. Aunt Paradox was passing her handkerchief over her suddenly heated face.

"The other will?" she gasped. "Does the other will stand good?"

"Certainly not," said Richard. "Fortunately it has not been proved. Stephon had to go again to Ireland and was not here to attend to it."

Her voice seemed to be failing her. "Shall I not get my five hundred a year?" she faltered.

Richard would not tell her the truth just now—that she would get nothing. He plunged into comments upon the news, as if her question had escaped his ears.

"Uncle Charles must have had his will out that night, looking at it. Gatty remarked that he drew the candles close to him on the table as if he were about to read, though the man saw no book about. And he no doubt, later, put the will back in its envelope, and slipped it into the inner pocket of his dressing-gown, before causing Gatty to place his desk on the table that he might write to Stephon. To think of the searchings we had!—in every nook and corner of the house, likely and unlikely!—and never remembered to effectually look in the pockets of that seedy old dressing-gown!"

"Does Mary take anything under the new will?" asked Arminia, suddenly speaking for the first time.

"I believe so," answered Dick. "One thing I know she takes; I remember that. She has all Aunt Charles's jewels. They are specially bequeathed to her."

"Nonsense!" fired Aunt Paradox, getting her voice up. "My Cousin Jane's jewels are not suitable for a child; they are unusually valuable. You must make a mistake, Richard; you never saw the will, you know."

"Just so; they are very valuable," nodded Richard; "their value no doubt, caused Uncle Charles to make them a special bequest. Any way, they are Mary's now. No, I never saw the will, as you observe; I only heard of its contents from Stephon."

"Shall you stay on here now?" she continued.

"I go up to-morrow."

"I suppose I must go with you," said George Ryde, in a grumbling tone; "I have lots of matters to see to. But I shall soon come down again. Very soon, my love," he whispered to Mary.

The new and legal will was proved without delay. With the exception of legacies to servants, Richard and Mary Damer came into nearly all the property. Aunt Paradox was in a distressing state; down in the depths of woe one hour, in a furious passion the next.

But Richard Damer was not hard upon her. After keeping her a month in suspense, for punishment, he made over to her property which would bring her in five hundred a year; the money to lapse in equal shares to her son and daughter at her death.

And in due course of time—a short course and not a long one—there was a gay wedding at Hartley Manor, when Mary became the wife of George Ryde.

TWO WOMEN OF LETTERS OF THE LAST CENTURY.

THE one notable feature of that most barren of all epochs in English literature, the last three decades of the eighteenth century, was the rise of female talent. Woman for the first time became a power in literature. Now and again lady authors had appeared, but they had been regarded only as curious phenomena, and their influence had been for evil rather than good. Joanna Baillie, Mrs. Barbauld, Fanny Burney, and Hannah More were the mothers of that long line of writers who have done so much to purify the tone of our literature.

Probably these early authoresses were indebted for much of their success to the novelty of the thing. It was considered so astonishingly clever in a woman to write a book, and people read it as they would have gone to see some wonderful production of nature. Again, the style was fresh, and social and moral objects and questions were regarded from a new point of view. Otherwise it would be difficult to account for the avidity with which the public bought works that would now fall stillborn from the press—even if they could find a publisher so recklessly venturesome as to stand sponsor to them. Devoid as these lives are of romance and incident, they are interesting as pictures of manners and conditions of life which have passed away; and they are instructive as pictures of calm, well-regulated minds, pursuing an even course of usefulness and tranquil enjoyment, knowing little or nothing of the feverish impulses and unrest which harass the humanity of these last years of our century. The present article proposes to briefly relate the story of two of the most remarkable of these, Hannah More and Joanna Baillie

To begin.

Hannah More was born at Stapleton, a Gloucestershire village, near Bristol, in the year 1745. Her father, who was a schoolmaster, died while she was still very young, leaving behind a widow and five girls —the youngest of whom was only two years old—with little or no provision. Of the mother we hear but little, but there was plenty of energy among the girls; as an instance, the elder used to walk daily to Bristol and back to learn French, and then return and teach it to her sisters. Hannah, who was the fourth daughter, seems to have received little regular education, but her diligence and love of study more than made up for such deficiences. From a French officer, a prisoner on parole, who lodged with them, she perfected her knowledge of that language, taught herself Italian, and read indefatigably.

Years afterwards one of the sisters described this period of their lives to Dr. Johnson in a very lively and graphic manner. "With the

same ease, familiarity, and confidence we should have done had only our own dear Dr. Stonehouse* been present, we entered upon the history of our birth, parentage, and education, showing how we were born with more desires than guineas, and how, as years increased our appetites, the cupboard at home began to grow too small to gratify them; and how, with a bottle of water, a bed, and a blanket, we set out to seek our fortunes; and how we found a great house with nothing in it; and how it was likely to remain so till, looking into our knowledge boxes, we happened to find a little learning, a good thing when land is gone, or rather none; and so at last, by giving a little of this learning to those who had less, we got a good store of gold in return." In other words, the orphan sisters opened a school.

Before Hannah arrived at her seventeenth birthday she had composed a sacred drama, "The Search for Happiness," for the use of her pupils. Such exercises for young ladies were common in those days, and had been from the time that Racine wrote "Esther" and "Athalie" for Madame de Maintenon's pupils at St. Cyr. The little piece was published, and this first juvenile effort actually ran through three editions.

And now the Misses More's school became so famous, and was so largely patronised, that they were enabled to remove it to more spacious quarters, in Rack Street, Bristol.

The next year Hannah produced a translation of Metastasio's "Attilio Regolo," which she called "The Inflexible Captive," and which was acted at the Theatres Royal, Bath and Exeter, with some success.

Here let us pause for a moment to relate the one sentimental episode of our heroine's life.

A rich gentleman, named Turner, fell in love with the bright, vivacious, clever girl, and although he was some forty years her senior, she accepted the offer of his hand and heart. The day was named, the wedding trousseau prepared, when, for some inexplicable reason, the bridegroom desired that the happy event might be put off. Again a time was fixed, and again the gentleman found a cause to defer it. Hannah's friends now interposed, and the match, after some further delay, was finally broken off. Mr. Turner proposed to compensate the young lady for her expense and disappointment by an annuity, and, strange as it appears, she was ultimately prevailed upon to accept this compromise. He seems to have always held her in affectionate remembrance, for at his death, many years afterwards, he bequeathed her a legacy of a thousand pounds.

In 1774 she paid her first visit to London. Literary reputations were easily made in those days, for upon the strength of the two novels just named and a volume of poems, Miss More gained admittance to the first literary coterie in the metropolis, and was there

* Sir James Stonehouse, a celebrated physician, who had settled at Bristol, a great patron of the Mores.

received with much effusiveness by such men as Reynolds, Burke, Garrick, and even Johnson. For Garrick she conceived a most enthusiastic friendship. Some of the most striking descriptions of his performances may be found in her letters, and he petted and flattered her as he did all who paid tribute to his genius. A poem entitled "Sir Eldred of the Bower," written in imitation of the old ballads which Dr. Percy in his "Reliques" had brought into fashion, still further increased her fame, and rendered her quite a lioness in society. Johnson was in raptures with her. "If," writes her sister, "a wedding should take place before our return, don't be surprised, between the mother of Sir Eldred, and the father of my much loved Irene.* Nay, Mrs. Montagu says if tender words are the precursors of connubial engagements, we may expect great things, for it is nothing but 'child,' 'little fool,' 'love,' and 'dearest.' If Hannah's head stands proof against all the adulation and kindness of the great folks here, why, then, I will venture to say nothing of this kind will meet her hereafter."

Her fame was prodigiously increased by the production of her tragedy of "Percy," written under the supervision of Garrick himself, produced at Covent Garden in 1777, and played seventeen nights—a great run in those days—to crowded houses. Lord Lyttelton went six or seven times; Mrs. Boscawen, a noted dilettante, sent her a laurel crown; and the Duke of Northumberland, whose ancestor she had painted in such heroic colours, sent her a handsome pecuniary present.

"Mr. Garrick's study, Adelphi, 10 at night,"—she writes to her sister describing the first performance: "He himself puts the pen in my hand, and bids me say that all is just as it should be. Nothing was more warmly received. I went with Mr. and Mrs. Garrick, sat in Mrs. Harris's box, in a snug, dark corner, and behaved very well, that is very quietly. The prologue and episode were received with bursts of applause—so indeed was the whole—as much beyond my expectation as my deserts. Mr. Garrick's kindness has been unceasing."

Full of pleasant pictures of kind, dear, genial, good-hearted David Garrick are her letters. How they made much bargaining over the aforesaid prologue, which he wrote for her; how he told her that Dryden got handsome sums for those effusions, but as he, Garrick, was a richer man, he would be content with a good supper and a bottle of claret; how she declared she could not go beyond a steak and a pot of porter; and how the matter finally settled down into a supper of bread and honey.

Four thousand copies of the new tragedy were sold in a fortnight, and the authoress realised about £600. It kept the stage for many years, and Alwina, the heroine, was a favourite part of Mrs. Siddons. But the play has long since become obsolete; it is essentially of the

* The heroine of Johnson's tragedy of that name.

dramatic school of the eighteenth century; though not destitute of tenderness and power it is long-winded, declamatory, and deficient in the first essentials of the drama, action and situation.

The next year, still under the tuition of her friend, she produced a second tragedy: "The Fatal Falsehood," but it did not attain the success of "Percy." Every trifle that now came from her pen was eagerly caught up; as an instance, an ode upon Garrick's dog, Dragon, after a large circulation in manuscript, was printed and a thousand copies were sold in a week.

Garrick's death, in 1778, was probably the greatest affliction that ever fell upon her placid life. One of her letters contains a very touching description of the sad event. In another she says: "I went yesterday with the Wilmots to pay a visit to the coffin. The last time the same party met in that room was *to see him perform Macbeth.* He changed so soon he was obliged to be soldered up. What would I have given for a sight of his face." She seems to have entertained more than a friendship for the great actor—it was rather a platonic love. From the time of his death she grew more serious; there is no longer the same vivacity of feeling in her letters. In one, dated 1779, she says: "My way of life is very different from what it used to be; you must not, therefore, expect much entertainment from my letters."

Drawn thither by affectionate remembrances, she spent many succeeding winters with the widow of her dear friend, at Hampton. But oh, how changed was the old place from what it had been in the old days, when it was the resort of all that was noble and brilliant in society, and was rendered the brightest house in all England by the wit and inexhaustible variety of its master. A second Hamlet might have soliloquised in these deserted chambers, using the words that had so often fallen from the great actor's own lips: "Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar?" What a contrast to such scenes is afforded in this passage from one of her letters: "We," she and Mrs. Garrick, "never see a human face but each other's. Though in such deep retirement I am never dull, because I am not reduced to the fatigue of entertaining drones, or of being obliged to listen to them. We dress like a couple of Scaramouches, dispute like a couple of Jesuits, eat like a couple of aldermen, walk like a couple of porters, and read as much as any two doctors of either University. I wish," she says in another place, "the fatal twentieth was well over. I dread the anniversary of that day."

She never entered a theatre after Garrick's death, not even to see Mrs. Siddons in the height of her popularity personate the part of Alwina. She would not have her memories of the greatest actor confused by those of any inferior performer; and, as it has been before intimated, her views of life yearly grew more narrow and austere. For several years, however, she spent several months among the cliques

and coteries of London society; published a volume of sacred dramas and several poems, the most famous of which was "The Bas-Bleu," written upon the blue-stocking assemblies held at Mrs. Montagu's. Johnson called it "a great performance," and it is certainly a very sprightly one.

This was the last of her lighter works. In 1785 she entirely withdrew herself from the gay world, and settled down in a charming residence which she had had built near Wrington, in Somersetshire, and christened Cowslip Green.

She did not, however, abandon literature, with its associations, although it was to a more serious style of composition that she now devoted herself. In 1787 she published, "Thoughts on the Manners of the Great," a severe stricture upon the irreligion and frivolity of the upper classes. This was followed a few years later by a work upon the same subject, entitled "An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World." Her biographers claim that a vast improvement was effected in the manners of those whom she addressed in these treatises. The sale was certainly enormous; seven large editions were sold within a few months, and one edition in four hours. They appeared, it must be confessed, at a very appropriate time, when their teachings were strongly enforced by the events of the French Revolution, which frightened so many people into propriety. It need scarcely be said that she was greatly shocked at the principles which that terrible social earthquake scattered abroad, and did all that her pen could do to counteract them. A little pamphlet, entitled "Village Politics," was taken up by the government, who caused it to be everywhere disseminated. The £240 she made by the sale were given to a fund for refugee ecclesiastics.

But ere this she had engaged herself and sisters in a work of active philanthropy, which reflects more lustre upon her name than the brightest of her writings.

Cowslip Green was situated in the neighbourhood of the Mendip Hills, among a population existing in a state of brutal degradation that could be paralleled, in living memory, only by that of the hand-nail makers of Staffordshire and Worcestershire; whole families knew no other abodes than the natural caverns among the hills, and no more of moral or religious restrictions than savages. Those were the days when the country clergy considered that a couple of prosy sermons, preached to a sleepy congregation every Sunday, were a conscientious fulfilment of all the duties attached to their office, and that such black sheep were quite beyond the pale or consideration of the church. It was for the mental, moral, and religious improvement of these miserable outcasts that Hannah More established the Mendip Schools.

Her ideas upon the education of the masses, as they are now called, would, I am afraid, excite only the indignation of an advanced schoolboard member. "My notions of instructing the poor," she writes,

"are very limited. I allow *no writing*, nor any reading but the Bible, catechism, and such little tracts as may enable them to understand the Christian service." Even this meagre programme was difficult to carry out among those for whom it was initiated. But this good woman persevered, and succeeded in establishing her schools in numerous parishes for many miles round. Every Sunday they were all visited by her or one of her sisters in a circuit of from thirteen to thirty miles. Once a year there was a commemorative and festive gathering, at which sometimes as many as thirteen hundred children were present. She also founded, in the same districts, benefit clubs for the women, to which they paid a few halfpence weekly, and in time the funds were counted by thousands.

Between 1795 and 1798 she and her sisters were busily employed upon a series of tracts for the poor, which they called "The Cheap Repository," and which gave weekly a tale, ballad, and lesson appropriate for Sunday reading. Some of these, all admirably written, such as "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain," are not yet forgotten. The circulation of these little books is said to have reached a million, which, when we consider the population of the kingdom and the few who could then read or cared to read, has no parallel even in this age.

Besides these works for the ignorant and humble, she wrote a series of treatises upon female education. One, "Hints towards forming the Character of a Young Princess," was inspired by no less a person, it is said, than Queen Charlotte, and was written for the benefit of the Princess of that name. The most famous of her books, and the only one that is now even occasionally read, "Cœlebs in Search of a Wife," was published in 1805. After this she composed only works upon religious subjects. "Moral Sketches of Prevailing Opinions," which appeared in 1819, closed her literary labours.

During all these years the bonds of sisterhood which had united the five orphan girls at their father's death were never broken by marriage or disagreement. Of course, competency had been acquired, and the school course given up years and years ago. The cottage at Cowslip Green had also been quitted for a more commodious residence called Barcley Wood. Here the five maiden sisters continued to live together, until death, one by one, in the natural order of their ages, dissolved their life-long union. Hannah survived unto her eighty-eighth year, when, full of honour, she ended her calm and useful life at her house, No. 4, Windsor Terrace, Clifton, on September 7, 1833. She had realised £30,000 by her writings, £10,000 of which she bequeathed to charitable and religious institutions.

The works of this once famous author have long since sunk into oblivion, and a collected edition may now occasionally be picked up upon an old bookstall at a price less than the smallest cost at the time of issue. The only part of her numerous writings which have any interest for the present or future generation are her letters, which in

their lively and graphic pictures of the men and manners of her time will always be valuable material for the biographer and historian.

A quaint, curious, delightful, old-world place, redolent with pleasant associations, is Hampstead. It is so unlike the dreary waste of rectangular roads and streets, each so like the other in its monotonous rows of snug, stuccoed houses, garden fronted with regulation shrubs, that distinguish the environs of the Metropolis in general. It rejoices in the wildest and most capricious irregularity; there is not a straight or a level thoroughfare within its precincts; you ascend one steep winding hill only, it would seem, to descend another; streets branch off at angles unknown to geometricians, narrow alleys slope down at the steepest gradients; one side of a road is so much higher than the other that you find yourself on a level with the bed-room windows of the opposite houses; converging roads meet in triangles, circles, polygons, with a most reckless and delightful contempt for economy of space.

> "Streets, hills, and dells, trees overhead, now near,
> Now down below, with smoking roofs between—
> A village revelling in varieties,"

wrote Leigh Hunt. Then there are great Georgian mansions of red brick, with carved pediments, and porticoes, and high walls, enclosing wildernesses of orchard and garden ground; quaint little shops nestling beneath bustling houses; rambling old inns, with cosy, low-ceiled straggling rooms, reminiscent of Dickens's novels and of Dickens himself, for, like Shelley and Coleridge and Lamb and Keats and Hunt, he loved Hampstead, and one old inn at least was a favourite resort of his; rows of ancient lime trees, gouty, gnarled and carbuncled with age, like the old port wine bibbers that used to hobble beneath them in the days when Hampstead was a fashionable inland watering-place. It is just the spot for a quiet contemplative spirit of literary and refined tastes to take up its abode in, and of such an one I am about to tell the story.

In one of the quaintest and most characteristic parts of the town, between handsome, towering, Italian-looking, new Consumption Hospital and the old "Holly Bush Inn," with its low wooden walls, in whose "Assembly Rooms," once the studio of George Romney, literary and artistic conversations used to be held, is a plain, unpretentious-looking red-brick dwelling, with a small garden in front, shaded on each side by rows of old lime trees, and called Balton House. People pass it every day without a second glance; and yet, commonplace as it looks, it was once regarded as a shrine of genius; and thither came pilgrims from far and near, even from America, to pay homage to the author of the once celebrated "Plays of the Passions," who long resided there.

How barren of incident the lives of literary people are, as a rule, has been frequently remarked, and the life of Joanna Baillie more

than exemplifies the observation. It is not the story of struggle, suffering, endurance, and ultimate triumph, but the picture, Dutch in its plainness, of a good woman of cultivated mind, and suggestions of a literary society that has long passed away.

Joanna Baillie was born in 1762, at Bothwell, in Lanarkshire, and was the daughter of a Presbyterian clergyman of the old rigid ascetic type, who considered that the indulgence even of natural affection bordered upon the sinful. His children could not remember ever to have received a kiss from him. The mother was scarcely more demonstrative; and Joanna, when speaking of this time in after years, used to relate how she longed for love and caresses. But if she even clasped her little arms about her mother's knees, she was chid and repulsed; although she adds that the mother seemed to like it: which indicates that such unnatural sternness was the affectation of an over-righteousness which would repress all emotion, even the gentlest and most honourable to human nature, rather than utter coldness of heart.

But the child was not without love. She had a sister only one year older than herself; and the two, denied parental affection, became all in all to each other. They were left very much to themselves, to follow their own pleasures; and in a poem addressed to her sister on her birthday, Joanna gives a pretty picture of their young life.

We learn from the same poem that book learning had no charms for her, as a child, but the following bit of prose autobiography verifies the poetic picture: "I made my father's breakfasts melancholy, for I used to say my lessons to him then, and always cried over them. And yet, they say, this girl is not stupid neither; she is handy at her needle, and understands common matters well enough. I rambled over the heather and splashed in the brook most of the day." We hear too that Joanna was something of a romp, and when in due course she was sent to school, she was always the ringleader in every frolic, and would climb on to the roof of the house to recite scenes.

The Reverend Mr. Baillie must have been a man of learning, for we hear of him as being appointed Professor of Divinity at Glasgow. Upon his death, which happened while the sisters were still girls, the family removed to London, where a brother was already established as a physician, and took up their abode at Hampstead. Here Joanna became associated with the Barbaulds, the Aikins, and others of that literary and artistic coterie, which at this time made Hampstead its head quarters.

It was not until 1798 that she produced the first series of the "Plays of the Passions." It was published anonymously, and no one in the world was less likely to be suspected of the authorship than the quiet and retiring lady of thirty-six, who had won the admiration of Hampstead society by her devotion to her blind mother, upon whom she attended day and night. "Her genius," to quote Miss Aikin, "had shrouded itself under so thick a veil of silent reserve, that its

existence seems scarcely to have even been suspected beyond the domestic circle when 'The Plays upon the Passions' burst upon the world. The dedication of the volume to Dr. Baillie gave a hint in what quarter the author was to be sought, but the person chiefly suspected was the accomplished widow of his uncle, John Hunter. Of Joanna, at least, no one dreamed on this occasion. She and her sister arrived on a morning call at Mrs. Barbauld's; my aunt immediately introduced the topic of the anonymous tragedies, and gave utterance to her admiration. But not even the sudden delights of such praise, so given, would seduce our Scottish damsel into self-betrayal."

The curiosity of the reading public was much exercised as to their authorship, but when the secret at last oozed out that they were the composition of an unknown woman, the sale fell off. Four years later she published a second series, in 1812 a third, and between the two last, in 1804, a volume of miscellaneous dramas.

It was in 1806, while he was on a visit to London, that she first made the acquaintance of Walter Scott, and Sotheby, the poet, brought about the introduction at Hampstead. Joanna afterwards described the impression he made upon her. "I was at first a little disappointed, for I was fresh from the 'Lay,' and had pictured to myself an ideal elegance and refinement of feature; but I said to myself, 'If I had been in a crowd and at a loss what to do, I should have fixed upon that face among a thousand, as the sure index of the benevolence and the shrewdness that would and could help me in my strait. We had not talked long, however, before I saw in the expressive play of his countenance, far more even of elegance and refinement than I had missed in its mere lines."

Scott had conceived quite an enthusiastic admiration for her writings years before this. "'The Plays of the Passions,'" he wrote in one of his letters (1801), "has put me out of conceit of my Germanised feat, 'The House of Aspen.'" This meeting was the beginning of a life-long friendship, as the many letters which passed between them, preserved in "Lockhart's Life," will testify. His praise was sometimes extravagant, as when writing of her play upon "Fears," he says: "The language is distinguished by a rich variety of fancy which I know no instance of except in Shakespeare. . . . The mad scene in the fifth act is certainly one of the most sublime ever written."

But Byron said she was the only woman who could write a tragedy, and Charles James Fox expressed his rapturous admiration in five pages of criticism. The Quarterly Review, in one of its articles, gave her high praise. "Unversed in the ancient languages and literature," says the writer, "and by no means accomplished in those of her own age, or even of her own country, this remarkable woman owed it partly to the simplicity of her Scottish education, partly to the influence of the better part of Burns's poetry, but chiefly to the spontaneous action of her own powerful genius, that she was able at once, and apparently

without effort, to come forth the mistress of a masculine style of thought and diction, which constituted then, as it constitutes now, the characteristic merit of her writings, and which contributed most beneficially to the already commenced reformation of the literary principles of the century."

Such criticisms add another to the many proofs of the fallacy of contemporary judgments, which are so seldom endorsed by posterity. While Keats, Shelley, Coleridge and Wordsworth, were ridiculed and condemned, the now forgotten plays of Joanna Baillie were regarded as an event in the annals of the drama. Her writings, however, are not without merit, and at times indicate considerable power; but the plots being confined to the development of a single passion induced a monotony and paucity of incident and gave an artificial character to the whole which entirely removed them from ordinary human sympathies. The taste of the first decades of the present century certainly inclined towards such productions, and the dramatic literature of that period is little more than a mass of dreary declamation, powerful and poetic at times, but utterly destitute of the Promethean spark, or of that one touch of nature which makes the whole world kin.

One of the "Plays of the Passions," and one only, was performed upon the London stage: "De Montfort," which pourtrays the Passion of Hate. Kemble and Mrs. Siddons performed the hero and heroine, and it was acted eleven nights with some success. It was revived for Edmund Kean, but after being performed a few times was relegated to the oblivion from which it will never again emerge.

In 1810 "The Family Legend" was produced at the Edinburgh Theatre. In a letter dated January 30 in that year, Scott gives a most enthusiastic account of its reception. "The house was crowded to a most extraordinary degree; many people had come from your native capital of the west; everything that pretended to distinction, whether from rank or literature, was in the boxes, and in the pit such an aggregate mass of humanity as I have seldom if ever witnessed in the same space."

Then he goes on to tell of the deep interest that at once seized upon the audience, of the sobs that were heard on all sides, of the applause, the cheering, the throwing up of hats and handkerchiefs when at the end it was announced for repetition during the week. Mrs. Siddons was again the heroine, and the play had a run of fourteen consecutive nights, an enormous success in those days. But this theatrical triumph was but evanescent. It was a sad disappointment to Joanna when the truth was forced upon her that her plays were "Caviare to the general." Apropos of which there is a charming anecdote in Fanny Kemble's "Recollections." "The desire and ambition of her life," writes that lady, "had been to write for the stage, and the reputation she achieved as a poet did not reconcile her to her failure as a dramatist. I remember old Mr. Sotheby, the poet, telling me of a visit he had once paid her, when, calling him into her

little kitchen (she was not rich, kept few servants, and did not disdain sometimes to make her own pies and puddings), she bade him, as she was up to the elbows in flour and paste, draw from her pocket a paper; it was a play bill, sent to her by some friend in the country, setting forth that some obscure provincial company was about to perform Miss Joanna Baillie's tragedy of 'De Montfort.' 'There,' exclaimed the culinary Melpomene, 'there, Sotheby, I am so happy! You see my plays can be acted somewhere!' Well, too, do I remember the tone of half-regretful congratulation in which she said to me: 'Oh, you lucky girl—you lucky girl, you are going to have your play acted.'"

In 1836, after an interval of twenty-four years, she gave to the public three more volumes of plays. The dramatic works already enumerated and a volume of "Fugitive Pieces," containing some charming songs and poems, which may still be read with pleasure, make up the sum of her literary labours.

In the society of numerous friends, and in the constant companionship of her dear Agnes, who, like herself, never married, the years flowed peacefully on. The deep sympathy and affection which had begun in childhood endured through life. There seems to have been much contrast between the characters of the two sisters; and it is very happily described in the poem I have already alluded to.

Crabb Robinson, in his diary (1812), gives us a miniature portrait of Joanna as she appeared at that time: "We met Miss Joanna Baillie and accompanied her home. She is small in figure and her gait is mean and shuffling, but her manners are those of a well-bred woman. She has none of the unpleasant airs too common to literary ladies. Her conversation is sensible. She possesses apparently considerable information, is prompt without being forward, and has a fixed judgment of her own, without any disposition to force it on others."

Here is a charming picture from Lady Chatterton's memoirs: "To-day we breakfasted with Harness. Dear old Joanna Baillie was there, looking so humble, unpretending, and full of simplicity. . . . Her figure so slim and well made. Her new old-fashioned dress too, which could not have been worn more than once or twice, yet made according to the fashion of ten or twelve years ago, and smelling sweet of the rose leaves and lavender with which it had been probably shut up for years, delighted me, and so did the little old lace cap that encircled her peaceful face. The calm repose of her manner—the cheery and hopeful countenance, seemed to do me good, it was so unruffled by the flutter and excitement of modern times. Harness, too, describes to me her life—original, simple, and full of real enjoyment."

Wordsworth paid her a noble compliment when he said: "If I had to present anyone to a foreigner as a model of an English gentlewoman, it would be Joanna Baillie." Not less suggestive are Lucy Aikin's words: "She was the only person I have ever known whom

thirty years of acquaintanceship, while they continually deepened my affection, wore away nothing of my reverence." The same writer tells us that, although she had resided in London from her girlhood, she retained her Scotch accent and a predilection for *bare feet* throughout her life.

And so within sight and sound of the great, struggling, roaring world of London, upon which through its grey pall of smoke they could look down and hear the distant hum of its restless myriads, the two sisters, who from childhood, side by side, their "earthly journey held," lived on in their peaceful home untroubled, as far as we can know, by care or sorrow. Sometimes mayhap, when she would hear of some great dramatic success, Joanna might suppress a sigh as she thought of her own disappointed hopes, of the works, already forgotten, from which she had once hoped to reap the feverish glory of a stage triumph. What a strange ambition for this little, quiet, shrinking woman to cherish! This we may suppose was the only shadow that ever crossed her life. One by one her old friends and brilliant contemporaries passed away, until she remained one of the last of her generation. To few is it vouchsafed that their earthly pilgrimage shall extend to ninety years, but that was her age when the end came at last. She lies in the pretty old-fashioned grave-yard of the parish church, and she could have found no fitter resting-place. Her sister, Agnes, survived her ten years, dying, in 1861, at the great age of one hundred years.

H. Barton Baker.

YOSODHARA.

By the Author of "The Prophet's Mantle."

IT was an ideal spot for a lounge and a smoke, and the ruined Abbey, ivy-veiled, moss-covered, was an ideal subject for a sketch. Only the first of these ideals had been acted on, for though an easel was set up at a good point, the canvas on it was blank except for a little scribble of a head in one corner. There were some artists' tools lying on the ground, and among them a note-book whose white pages the weak wind was gently fluttering. A great hawthorn tree grew close against the wall of what had been the refectory, and the grass under it was thick and cool and green. Stray gleams of sunshine filtered through the screen of leaves and boughs, and fell in shifting patches of softened light on the two young men who lay there, idly blowing clouds of blue-grey smoke into the clear August air.

"Has it ever struck you," said the younger of the two, breaking a long restful silence, "that you and I are not unlike two celebrated heroes of modern fiction?"

"Well, I always thought myself rather like Guy Livingstone; but I don't know who on earth you're like—unless it's Bunthorne," with a glance at his friend's velvet coat.

"My dear Rivers, we are the living counterparts of the twins in the 'Golden Butterfly.'"

"No, no, Kerr," cried Rivers, "we're not quite fifty! And we do get through some work, and we don't both fancy ourselves in love with the same woman."

"Ahem!" said Kerr, and they both laughed. "Seriously though," he went on, "the resemblance, in one point at least, is simply startling. We came here three weeks ago; you to begin your picture for next year's Academy, and I to finish the play which is to make me famous. What have we done so far? You have made about forty odd sketches of one charming little head, and I have written about the same number of sonnets and rondels and quatrains under the same inspiration."

"By jove! I'm afraid you're about right." And in view of the seriousness of the situation, Mr. John Rivers raised himself on his elbow to deliver himself of his sentiments. "Look here, Kerr; it's too near luncheon time to begin anything now, but I shall commence a sketch of this tree and wall this very afternoon, and I should advise you to get through with your next scene."

"I admire your virtuous resolution immensely," returned Kerr. "I am sorry I can't join you in carrying out the same, for our

goddess promised me that she would take us over the shut-up part the Abbey this afternoon. I've no doubt she'll be delighted to excuse you on the plea of this access of industry, but I shall go with her, lest she should feel neglected."

"Oh, well, one afternoon won't make much difference, and I am anxious to see these mysterious apartments. One must sacrifice even work to the acquirement of knowledge."

"That's all very well, but if this sort of thing goes on, you'll go back to town an engaged man."

"To have my beer poisoned by you—no, thanks!" and John Rivers gathered up his paraphernalia, and the two strolled lunch-wards, down the green slope of turf on which the ruin stood.

At the foot of the incline was their present home, a small house which seemed to have once been a lodge or something of that kind, but had been added to and enlarged to suit the requirements of various tenants, till it had grown into a fairly comfortable little dwelling. There was a good deal of ivy and Virginia creeper about it; and one side was covered with thick jasmine green, set with faint stars, which made the air heavy with their strong sweet scent. There were roses too, round the windows, and big fuchsia trees on each side of the door. The little garden was a mass of gorgeous colours, ablaze with dahlias and hollyhocks and carnations, and behind the house rose a wooded hill-side which made a dark background to the vivid brilliancy of the flowers.

But the prettiest thing about the place was the picture framed by the porch. A woman, a young woman, brown haired and dark eyed, with an exquisite complexion, a red mouth that was simply perfect, and a nose and chin that had about them an indescribable suggestion of self-reliance and independence.

The two young men raised their hats as they came in sight of her, for this was Mrs. Elder, the house's mistress—the lovely widow—the fair vision that had inspired pen and pencil for three whole weeks.

When artist and playwright, favoured by fate and a guide-book, had first lighted on this spot, they had thanked fortune very earnestly for her favours, for Mrs. Elder was not a bit like the ordinary letter of lodgings, or the regulation widow either. She had a frank, sparkling way with her, and in speech and manner was quite the equal of her lodgers. Of course they were at once on fire with curiosity to find out her history. They learned it with ease from one Miss Dixon, an aunt, who was a fixture on the premises.

Mrs. Elder's maiden name had been Ellington. Her uncle had been for years the attached and faithful attendant—half attendant, half companion—of Mr. Dalgleish, late owner of the Abbey. This owner—after half a life-time of Eastern sojourn—had suddenly returned to Langdale, caused some half-dozen rooms in the Abbey to be repaired, and, taking up his abode there, had lived an intensely solitary life, shared only by his attendant, Dixon.

After awhile, Dixon's widowed sister died, leaving to his care her child. He was much embarrassed by this strange charge, and consulted his master, who, when he had seen the little girl—then about four years old—was so pleased with her that he promptly undertook to be responsible for her keep and education. So Miss Dixon—who for many years had kept a school in Broadchester, and was now growing older, and tired of her work—was sent for to take care of little Margaret, who grew up a strange mixture of unusual knowledge and unusual ignorance. Mr. Dalgleish taught her himself: would not allow Miss Dixon to do so: and the village looked on with dismay. For he was rumoured to be a Buddhist, and the prevalent idea of a Buddhist in those parts was of a man who burned people in wicker cages whenever he got the chance, who stained himself blue, and said his prayers to the mistletoe. No one could tell if he were blue or not, for no one ever saw him but Dixon and his sister and the child—and they hardly saw anyone else—but it was certain that he did not go to church.

Mr. Dalgleish had outlived all his near relations, and everyone thought he would leave a provision for Yosodhara, as he called the little Margaret—and as everyone else grew to call her. But when one day he was found dead in his bed, it turned out that there was no will, and no money, nothing but the old Abbey, which passed into the hands of a very distant relative. Yosodhara—who was now seventeen—and her aunt and uncle were left without any resource. The girl might get employment, but her uncle and aunt were too old to take a place again, and they were beginning to think bitterly of old age and poverty, as a not distant possibility when, to their immense surprise, Yosodhara suddenly engaged herself to John Elder, a small farmer who lived in the lodge, and had long admired the girl. She had never before, however, given him the slightest encouragement, and Miss Dixon firmly believed that the marriage had been contracted by Yosodhara simply for the sake of her aunt and uncle, whom John Elder gladly agreed to accept as members of the family. He was very much in love, and would have agreed to anything. He kept his agreement till the day of his death, which was not very long after that of his wedding. Yosodhara's brief married life only lasted three months, and then John Elder fell from his horse, and his wife became his widow. He left her his savings, which, eked out by the letting of lodgings in the summer, enabled her to live comfortably. Old Dixon had died some three years ago. Yosodhara had been a widow six years. There had been many suitors, but none had been successful. The owner of the Abbey had reduced their rent, and in return they took charge of the ruin.

What could be more romantic? Kerr and Rivers had certainly some excuse. It isn't every day you meet a young woman with a lovely face, a history, and such a name as Yosodhara. Can you wonder that they both dreamed and thought and wrote of very little

else but of her. Neither wished to be thought in earnest. And so neither had the courage to object to the other's chaff, lest it should be supposed that he thought the matter serious. Both felt that a crisis was approaching—each imagined that he would be the hero of it—while he affected to believe that the other was the only one really interested. She could hardly have been unconscious of their devotion, but she appeared quite unconcerned by it. Possibly the same thing generally happened with her summer lodgers. She had the sufficiently rare quality of attraction without coquetry, and such small favours as she did bestow were bestowed with absolute impartiality.

Things had now reached a stage when the pleasure each felt in being with her was apt to be marred by a sense of irritation and jealousy at the other's being there too. So it was as much a relief as a disappointment when she came to their room door after lunch and said, with a smile that set two hearts beating fifty per cent faster :

"I am so sorry I can't go with you to-day. I have a friend coming to see me, and I must not be out. But here are the keys. I hope you will enjoy yourselves. There's nothing sacred. You are free to go where you will. Only please lock the doors again, because I don't let people go in unless I'm sure they will respect the old place. You'd better not smoke in there—it's as dry as tinder."

She accepted their regrets very graciously, walked with them to the garden gate, and stood there, when they had gone, shading her eyes with her hand and looking after them. At the bend of the path which would lead them out of sight they turned to take another look at the graceful white figure. She waved her hand to them, and moved towards the house, with a faintly amused smile on her fair face.

Langdale Abbey was not at all a "show" place. Nearly the whole of it had fallen into decay ; but it was less a ruin now than it had been forty years ago, for the late owner had had all that could be repaired made habitable. What remained of the chapel, the refectory, and the greater part of the building was too shaky, and too much eaten away by ivy, to be available ; but five or six rooms in the front of the building had been plastered and painted and made fit to live in. All outward signs of this restoration were hidden by moss and lichen ; and ivy had crept over nearly all the masons' work. This habitable portion was divided by the archway of the main entrance ; Mr. Dalgleish's rooms having been on one side and the Dixons' on the other.

"Let's first look at the nursery of the fair Yosodhara," said Kerr as they left the blazing sunlight without, and entered the cool black shadow of the arched entrance. The large keys were tried one by one, till the dark heavy oak swung slowly outwards and the two young men passed through the narrow doorway.

The nursery of the fair Yosodhara was, perhaps, interesting from a

sentimental point of view: at least to the eyes that now scrutinised it: but whatever charm it possessed was certainly not due to its ancient or picturesque aspect, for painters and plasterers, carpenters and joiners, had done their best to modernise it in the most commonplace style of the present era. A very cursory glance satisfied Rivers' eyes, and even Kerr couldn't get much poetry out of the bare boards, whitewashed ceilings and grained paint.

But with the rooms on the other side it was different. Here the modern patchwork had been made under the restraint of an artist's surveillance. Mr. Dalgleish had exercised this so successfully that it seemed that not only most of the place, but all, had arisen in the Ages of Faith.

Two of the rooms were comparatively small, and their interest was soon exhausted; but the third was a long high chamber, with carved oak panels, and a ceiling of vaulted stone. The windows were small; and through their stained glass the sun shot long, many-coloured arrows, that spent themselves in little pools of red and blue and yellow, on the stone floor. This room had not been altogether dismantled. There was an Indian cabinet, there were strangely made images, and some oak furniture black with age. A cross was carved in the oak at one end of the room, and from the gloom over the door at the other end flashed the yellow eyes and gleaming teeth of a Bengal tiger's head. In the whole place was a bewildering blending of the mediæval and the Oriental.

"What colouring," said Rivers, when they had stood silent for a moment. "What an effect!"

"Not bad," assented Kerr, trying the drawers of the cabinet one by one, and shutting each up again with its emptiness and its dusty corners and its untold story. "I say, isn't it said that the late lamented was a Brahmin or something?"

"He was a Buddhist, anyway, and gentlemen of that persuasion have an awkward knack of turning up again years after they are supposed to be put comfortably away," said Rivers. "Are you quite sure his astral shell isn't looking over your shoulder now?" he added, so suddenly as to make Kerr look round with a start, ending in a laugh.

"At any rate, I mean to look round the place. I might find a receipt for the elixir of life or something of that kind."

"Look away," said Rivers; "I'm going to make a pencil sketch of this interior. I shall bring my colours to-morrow, and make a beginning on my picture."

With which he established himself in a great arm-chair against the wall, and began to work, while Kerr wandered idly about the rooms, curiously examining everything.

The artist began a sketch of the room, but presently more curves than angles began to show themselves on the paper, and before long there was a pretty accurate drawing—not of the Indo-mediæva

interior, but of Yosodhara, as she had looked standing at the gate to wave her good-bye.

He was stroking his light beard, and contemplating his work with some complacency, when a sharp rap, apparently just above his head, brought him to his feet with a bound, and scattered his papers round him.

"Is that you, Kerr?" he shouted.

"Is *what* me?" was the reply.

"Is that you kicking up that row? You'd better look out. This oak must be very thin, or I shouldn't hear so plainly."

As he spoke, Kerr came in at the door.

"The oak may be thin," he said, laughing, "and so is the wall: only about three or four feet."

"You must have heaved a brick at the wall, then, to have made a row like that."

"I only went for a spider with my cane," the other said, taking up the sketch and looking at it with an expression which made his friend feel not disinclined to 'heave a brick' at *him*.

"Leave that alone," he said, impatiently. "Herein is mystery. This door is close to the dividing wall. Let's see how far off the other room door is."

"My dear fellow, that's exactly how I knew the walls were so thick."

"Then the wall must be hollow, and the deceased Buddhist gentleman is probably inside. This becomes thrilling. Let us investigate."

"Not I. It's a great deal too thrilling. Let's go home."

"No, no," said Rivers, "I believe we are going to find something out."

"Yes, the skeleton of a rat, or something equally valuable and cheerful. But seriously, this wall is not hollow," and he gave it a smart blow with his stick. It certainly sounded particularly solid.

"But behind the chair," said Rivers, who was getting a little excited —and he rapped on the place with his knuckles. "As hollow as a drum," he said triumphantly.

"That may be a flaw in the wall," returned Kerr; "I'll go round and see if it is the same the other side."

Presently—rap, rap.

"Yes, I can hear you distinctly. Try farther down."

Rap, rap. Almost inaudible. "Try farther up."

Rap, Rap. Much fainter. "It *does* go through," cried Rivers. "Come back. What shall we do?"

"I dare say we're the only people in the country who don't know of this hollow wall. Let's go and question the lovely widow."

"Not if I know it," laughed Rivers. "Within this wall are doubtless diamonds from Golconda, or precious stones from Indian idols' eyes."

"Within this wall you'll probably find the astral shell of an old person with a long beard and a turban, who will jump out on you," said Kerr. "It was doubtless he who rapped in the first instance. Perhaps I only invented that spider to soothe your nerves."

"Well, if he rapped, I expect he'd like to come out," said Rivers; "so here goes to the rescue." And he swung the big chair away, and began poking and prying with the big blade of his pocket knife among the delicate Gothic tracery of the carved panel.

"Don't be a fool, Rivers," said Kerr, after a bit. "That is not the way to discover secrets. If it's really anything more than an accidental hollow, there'll be a way of opening it without damaging your neighbour's property. I have always understood that secret springs were inevitable in these cases."

"Perhaps it opens from the other side."

"Perhaps it doesn't: the other side is a plain panel, which extends beyond the hollow on both sides. This is the right side, if any is. Let's press everything that looks as if it might have a spring in it."

Which they did, with no results.

"Oh, hang it all," cried the artist; "I shall go home and borrow the family hatchet," and he caught hold of a projecting bit of oak and tried to shake the panel.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before he felt a yielding beneath his hand, slight indeed, but very different from the solid resistance the wood had hitherto offered. The small projection in his hand was letting itself be drawn down, like a bolt, and presently the side of the panel against which he leaned turned slowly inwards as the other side came out; the whole thing turning on a central pivot.

"You've done it this time," cried Kerr. "Look out for ghosts!"

They both drew back a pace or two as the panel, having reached a position at right angles with the rest of the wall, came to a stop with a click.

The light from the window fell full on the opening and was quite enough to show all that there was to see, which was not much. There had apparently once been a doorway here, which had been boarded up, and then used as a place of concealment, and later as a cupboard. There was one shelf, and on it *something*.

In two minutes the friends had this something out on the stone window-ledge and were examining it. It was a square ebony box of exquisite Indian workmanship, inlaid with ivory, turtle-shell, and gold, and it was very heavy. The lid was loose, and came off without difficulty. On the upper tray lay a few Oriental gems, chains and rings, and besides them a folded paper, duly endorsed as the Will of Robert Dalgleish, Esquire, of Langdale Abbey, in the county of Devonshire. Kerr lifted the tray. Under it, arranged in the neatest way, were piles of gold mohurs and a few English sovereigns: about £2000, they guessed.

"And now, whose is all this?" cried Rivers. "That distant relation's, no doubt. Let's see."

But in the will was mentioned no distant relation. No one at all, in fact, except Margaret Ellington, to whom was bequeathed all the real and personal property of the testator.

"Then it *is* all Yosodhara's," said Rivers. "Old Ramchutnee wasn't such a bad fellow after all."

"What a fine chance for the man who breaks this news to her! She'd love him for ever."

"Would you like to do it?"

"I should," briefly replied Kerr.

"Then I'm hanged if you shall! We'll both tell her."

"In alternate gasps?" laughed Kerr.

"Ah, young, beautiful, bewitching—and with some thousands in gold mohurs," said Rivers dreamily, holding up a ruby ring to the light.

"And a ruin with a secret chamber, where one could hide one's rejected pictures."

"Or plays that had been withdrawn."

And then they were silent for a moment and the thought was in each mind: "Why didn't I propose to her, before we found this fearful money?"

"Well," Kerr said, presently, "I suppose we had better form ourselves into a procession of two and carry the treasure to its mistress."

A rustle outside: the door slowly opened.

"Hallo!" cried Rivers, with a slightly nervous laugh. "Here comes Geegeebhoy to take his own again."

But it wasn't. At least the former owner of that treasure had never been seen to walk during his lifetime in trailing white skirts and with roses in hair and dress.

"I've brought my friend here to introduce to you," began the apparition, when Rivers interrupted.

"Oh, Mrs. Elder," he exclaimed, "I'm so glad you've come, but we must speak to you alone for one minute."

The widow looked slightly surprised, but turned and said something through the door, and, closing it, came forward.

"Well," she said, "what is it you want to say?"

But when it came to the point, neither of them said anything—in alternate gasps or otherwise. Kerr thrust the will into her hands without a word, and the two stood watching her while she read it, and saw her brown eyes slowly fill with tears. She folded it up, just glancing at the gold and the movable panel.

Then came explanations from the two young men, to which she listened silently.

At last she said, looking down at the Indian box: "Thank you both so much. You have done me a great kindness. Yet I can't help

wishing this had come years ago. It would have meant so much more then than it does now. But," she added, with one of her brilliant sudden smiles, "it is opportune ; I can take it as a wedding present from the dead."

They looked at each other. What could she mean ?

"I didn't tell you," she went on. "The friend I want to introduce to you is Mr. James Vernon—you ought to know each other—he is an artist." She paused a minute and then added, slowly : "He was down here sketching last year—and we're going to be married at Christmas."

The introduction took place, and the young men survived. When the treasure-bearing procession did come off, it was Mr. James Vernon carried the box.

"What a wretch that fellow Vernon is," Rivers said, when he and his friend were alone.

"Isn't he ! But I never allowed myself to feel any special interest in Mrs. Elder."

"Neither did I !"

Next day two dejected young men returned to town. The following Christmas each received an Oriental ring, accompanied by the wedding cards of Mr. and Mrs. James Vernon.

John Hunter Rivers did get a picture hung next year. The subject was not a ruined Abbey. It was a study of a woman's figure at a gate.

Charlie Kerr has not yet finished his play, but he told me this story.

FABIAN BLAND.

ONLY A DAILY EPISODE.

A WINTER'S night, and the underground railway carriages crowded to suffocation. From some cause or other the line was unusually in request, the platforms at the different stations were a sea of heads; passengers struggled into whatever carriage might be opposite them, without reference to class.

"All the same to-night," called out one of the guards; "get in where you can."

The rain poured down in torrents in the streets outside; the windows of the carriages were closed against the fog and suffocating smoke; it was altogether a disagreeable night, and a disagreeable journey. No wonder that the carriages were fuller than they ought to be. An old gentleman, feeble, and looking very tired, got pushed into one, he hardly knew how.

"No room here," said a gruff man in the near corner.

But the door was banged to and the train went on. The poor old gentleman looked vainly about for a place to rest himself.

"Will you take my seat, sir?" said a pleasant voice near him.

He seemed surprised. "No, I thank you," said he, for it was a young lady who addressed him, and had risen.

"Oh, pray take it, sir," was the reply. "I am perfectly able to stand."

Immediately two young men arose, each to offer his seat, shamed into courtesy. The elder man took one of them thankfully. It brought him opposite to the girl who had spoken, and he began to study her appearance.

She had a sweet face, but it was not remarkably pretty; the hazel eyes were soft and intelligent, the smooth brown hair was banded under her bonnet. A modest, slight girl, of quiet bearing and middle height. She was dressed in a suit of dark blue cloth, trimmed at the neck with black fur. The old gentleman bent forward, and said a few grateful words for her kind thought of him.

"Oh, sir, it was nothing," she pleasantly answered. "I was sorry to see you stand; and standing does me no harm."

By degrees, as the stations were passed one after the other, the compartment gradually emptied itself of its occupants. At last only two people were left in it: the young lady and a gentleman who sat beyond her on the same side, in the corner. His soft hat was pulled low over his face, his coat collar was up; and on the little finger of the one ungloved hand was a signet-ring bearing a coat-of-arms.

Turning his head, he peered at the young lady, then took off his

hat and spoke. He was a good-looking man, with a thin, aristocratic face, his age about thirty, and his accent refined.

"Surely it is Miss Bayne? I think I cannot be mistaken."

The calm, pale face of Marian Bayne flushed the deepest crimson. Strange to say, her thoughts, straying from one past experience to another, had concentrated themselves on this very man. She loved him with her whole heart and soul. Quite at the first moment she almost questioned whether it was himself in reality, or only a vision.

"Captain Herries? Is it indeed *you?*"

"I knew you when you spoke to that old man," he said, moving next to her. "Strange, is it not, that we should meet here!"

At the end of the past summer, Marian Bayne had been invited by some friends, who were in a very good position of life, to accompany them to the sea-side: she and their daughter, Jane Canderley, had been schoolfellows. Captain Herries was staying at the same sea-side place; distantly related to the Canderleys, he was very much with them. A fascinating man, addicted to lavishing attentions on every girl he met, he won Marian Bayne's heart. Little notion had she, when he spoke so softly to her, smiled in her face so sweetly, lingered by her side and Jane's in the sultry noonday or the seductive moonlight, that it was only his usual manner with girls, and no more; that he had no wish to make her fall in love with him, and no thought of doing it; that he cared not at all for her, in that way.

"This is a most unexpected pleasure!" he resumed. "I have often thought of you, Miss Bayne."

Marian had regained her composure, though she could not suppress her tell-tale blushes. In a short time they were chatting gaily, the conversation naturally turning to the summer month they had just passed together, when for one at least, the time had flown by on golden wings.

"Do you recollect how Janey used to quarrel with me?" he said, laughing.

"Yes. It was all put on, you know; she did not mean it. You used to quarrel back again, Captain Herries."

"Of course I did; to tease her. Dear little Janey! Have you seen the Canderleys lately?"

"Never since then. I hear from Jane occasionally. They have gone to Nice for the winter, thinking Jane is not very strong."

"Yes, I know. And where have you been lately?—And what have you been doing?"

"I have been teaching."

"Teaching!" he repeated, in a surprised accent.

Marian Bayne blushed again, this time painfully. "My mother is not rich, and there are several of us at home, so I, the eldest, go out to teach," she explained. "I have a very good engagement indeed as

daily governess—in the city, of all places. We live down here, at the next station—which is the last on the line—and I go up by train in the morning and return at night."

Charles Herries twirled his fair moustache, and left the subject. He was entering upon another when the train began to slacken speed, and he looked up.

"I suppose you get out here also?" said Miss Bayne.

"The station just passed was, I believe, the one I ought to have got out at," he replied, laughing slightly. "I can go back to it; I want to look up a fellow who lives there. When shall we be likely to meet again?"

His blue eyes looked straight into hers as he put the question, and again she blushed.

"Sometime, perhaps," she answered.

The train stopped. Captain Herries got out that he might help out his companion. Her hand was in his, her foot on the step, when ——

What was it that had happened? There was a whirl, a fall, a commotion. Both of them were flat on the ground. The train had backed, or started forward, or something; and Captain Herries, whose other hand had been grasping the carriage door, was dragged a yard or two along the platform.

They were soon up; little damage appeared to have deen done to either; to Marian, none. Captain Herries put his hand to his head, confessed to some giddiness, and sat down on a bench. The officials gathered round him, full of dismayed excuses for their refractory engine; but he good-naturedly told them he was not hurt.

"You had better come home with me and rest; my mother will give you some tea," said Marian. "Our house is close by."

"Thank you; I think I will," he answered.

He bade her take his arm, laughingly saying it would "steady" him, his step seemed shaky. Mrs. Bayne, a pleasant, motherly woman, was all commiseration when they entered. She made him lie on the sofa, and then turned to pour him out a cup of tea, which was on the table.

"Milk and sugar, Captain Herries?" she asked. "And I shall put you a little brandy in it?"

He did not answer.

"Do you take milk and sugar?" repeated Mrs. Bayne, turning to him. "Why——dear me!"

Something she saw startled her, and she ran to the sofa. Charles Herries was insensible, and as white as death.

One of the little boys ran for their doctor—Mr. Lett. He could not at first say what the injury was; but thought that Captain Herries ought by all means to be at once placed in bed, and not attempt to quit the house that night.

So their best bedroom was hastily prepared for him, and he was

taken up to it. Good Mrs. Bayne, hospitable and anxious, felt flurried and scared. The injury proved to be to the head. Mr. Lett brought another doctor the next day, and they both forbade his removal. A few days of perfect quiet where he was might put him all right again; but if he moved or disturbed himself in any way there could be no answering for the result.

So he lay in bed very quietly, waited on by Marian and her mother, returning them thanks of gratitude with his eyes more than with his lips, for talking was forbidden him. On the third day he dressed, and his bed was exchanged for the sofa, which was carried up to his room from below. He was getting better, and the danger seemed to be over. But he still required great care, and felt astonishingly weak.

Marian sat by the sofa and read to him; now from one book, now from another. He almost always chose poetry—and the theme was often *love*. He got into the habit of making a prisoner of her disengaged hand, and would hold it quietly in his, resenting any attempt of hers to withdraw it.

"Why?" he remonstrated in his subdued voice. "It soothes me."

So for his sake she let it be so. "For his sake;" that was how she excused it to herself. And often she would drop into a doze, her hand lying within his. If Marion's love grew deeper and deeper, and he also fell into love, was it any wonder? But this could not go on for ever.

One afternoon, just as the last rays of the setting sun were sinking in the west, she laid aside the book she had been reading to him, and mustering all her courage spoke.

"I am afraid this is the last day I shall be able to sit here and amuse you."

He turned to her quickly: he was partly sitting up on the sofa, not lying. "Why so?" he asked.

"Because I cannot stay away from my pupils any longer. They have been very good to excuse me till now. Mamma wrote to tell them that she had no one else to help her; the boys are at school all day, and the servant is fully occupied with her work."

"But I cannot spare you, Marion."

She shook her head with a smile. "Indeed you must; I have to go by an early train to-morrow morning. My two little pupils need me, you see."

"They do not need you half as much as you are needed here. Marion!"—his voice deepening with emotion—"don't you know that you have become indispensable to me?"

Her breath quickened a little; her face flushed. He had taken both her hands in his, and was gazing at her.

"I could not risk losing my situation," she stammered at last, breaking the silence, "and to stay away longer might imperil it. We were rich once, before papa died; but my mother's income is small now."

"I tell you that I will not spare you; that I cannot do without you," imperatively affirmed the invalid. "As to not affording to give up a situation, that's all egregious nonsense. Why, you had better be my wife, Marian."

A pause of silence, her heart beating wildly. He seemed to be waiting for her answer.

"Do—you—mean it?" she whispered at last, all confusion and bewilderment.

"Why, yes, my dear. I say I can't spare you. Not that I could marry yet; it will be some time first. I have spent a lot of money the past year or two, and must have time to pull things together. But I should not like to lose you, Marian."

This momentous conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Lett, who had not been able to call earlier. He pronounced his patient to be progressing most satisfactorily; to be three parts well, in fact; and told him it was chiefly owing to Mrs. Bayne's good care and nursing.

"Yes; I owe her a debt of gratitude that I can never repay," warmly assented Captain Herries. "When shall I be able to get down and go out?" added he.

"As soon as you please. To-morrow, if you like. There's no necessity for your remaining here longer, if you wish to be away."

"So our pleasant time is really coming to an end," said Charles Herries, to Marian, as the Doctor and Mrs. Bayne went downstairs, talking.

"And I must go back to my pupils to-morrow," she answered. "Truly, there is nothing else that can be done."

"Well, just for a time," he agreed, after a pause of consideration. "It may perhaps be as well that for a little while things should continue as they are at present."

He gently drew her face down to his, and kissed it, and slipped upon her finger a diamond ring. It was his own ring, and was too large for even her middle finger.

"Keep it until I exchange it for a plain gold one," he whispered. "My dear little companion! my darling Marian!"

The first thing the ring did was to fall off and roll away on the floor: Marian had been shaking up his cushion. She laughed, as she picked it up: and then a thought darted into her mind which she would not speak—was it a bad omen? He put it again upon her finger, but Marian hid it away from people's sight.

The next day but one Captain Herries took his departure, leaving a host of presents for everyone. The boys were set up in handsome toys, Mrs. Bayne had a brooch that could not have cost less than ten guineas, Marian a diamond ring. The ring was looked upon as only a remembrance to her amidst the other remembrances. When she put it on her finger that night, at tea, with a little ring of her own beyond it to keep it there in safety, the boys cried out what a muff

Captain Herries must be not to guess the size of her finger better than that—and one of them thought that splendid ring must have cost as much as mamma's brooch.

Captain Herries had a bit of a relapse at his London lodgings. All his own fault, the doctors told him; he would do too much at first. He wrote once or twice to Mrs. Bayne, and also to Marian. In Marian's letters there was nothing to betray the engagement between them; they were affectionate, pleasant letters, such as a brother would write to a sister, and all the world might read. He told them he was going to Madeira for a few months' sojourn: the doctors advised it. But, before going, he sent Mrs. Bayne a presentation to Christ's Hospital for her youngest son. How grateful she felt! It was what she had been unsuccessfully trying for.

And that seemed to close the brief acquaintanceship with Captain Herries. For several months afterwards they heard nothing of him. Then a letter came to Marian, dated from Paris. It was full of gossip, and it ended thus:

"I know that you must long ago have forgotten those foolish words we spoke to one another during my illness; and I beg your pardon for presuming to say what I did. I should like to be as your brother always, my dear Marian, and for you to be to me as a sister; any other relationship would, I feel now, have been a sad mistake; I have little doubt you feel the same. Perhaps you are already married; if so, I trust that it may be for your happiness. Once I get back home, though I don't know when that is to be, I shall hope to call and see you all."

It was a terrible blow to her; for she had placed her entire faith in him, had been living upon hope. She tried to be brave; to do secret battle with her trouble, and hide it; and she prayed for strength to persevere in the routine of dreary duties, which must henceforth be her portion.

He had merely lightly played with a woman's heart and broken it. Holding it, in his careless ease, as of no value. It was only an ordinary episode; one that occurs around us in the hazy world every day, though we suspect it not.

A. N. T.

MASTER BRUIN.

A True Story. By Marie Orm.

THE dust clouds, raised by a high and warm wind, almost covered the two, nay, we must say the three figures, moving along the sandy road which leads from a place of little note to Szegedin, both lying on the famous heath of Kecskemét.

The flat land of Hungary, divided by the Theiss into the two immense plains—the heath of Kecskemét and that of Débreczin—has been immortalized in song. All the wealth of poetical feeling of the noble Hungarian nation has been concentrated upon it; and the heart of the son of the "Puszta" breaks if he is removed from it.

The two young men wandering together belong to the gipsy race. Their features, eyes, teeth, and something peculiar in their gait, testify as much; but beyond these characteristics there is little similarity between them. The one wears the well-fitting Hungarian costume, and if it were not for the fiddle-case, hanging to a leathern strap slung over his shoulder, one might take him rather for a gentleman having left the town for a stroll rather than a musician engaged on a professional tour. The other, travel-stained and neglected in appearance, has donned a fantastic and somewhat defective garb of gay colours, retaining, nevertheless, in its cut the national character. What *his* profession is we shall reveal at once, by naming the third, and not least important personage, of the trio—a huge brown bear.

He is muzzled, and led by a chain fastened to his shining brass collar. Giving now and then a low grunt—at the heat and the blinding dust, I suppose—but on the whole resigned to his fate, he contentedly trots along beside his master. To be trotting on all four must be a comfort to one of his species who spends half his life dancing on two legs.

In spite of the difference in dress, manner, and speech, the two young men are friends. Their minds had first awakened in the same gipsy camp, where they had crawled about together with so many young creeping things of human or animal kind. In this crowd they had singled out each other; a strong tie of friendship closely united them. They kept close to each other through good and ill during their existence in their native camp, and one day, when scarcity was reigning in the latter, they left home together in search of an independent livelihood.

Their lines soon separated, for Guila, who was gifted with great musical talent, joined a small band of musicians, whilst János, less talented, less prepossessing in appearance, but endowed with marvellous agility, was adopted by a company of mountebanks. So they parted, and for years never met again until last night.

Guila had played the violin in the neighbouring village, from whence the two are now coming. An election meeting assembled the neighbouring gentry in the old tumbledown inn of Ar***haza, and the Hungarian likes, on such occasions, to conclude with wine and music. Guila's fiddle had graced the entertainment.

When he had charmed his audience with a performance of no common order, and sat down to pledge the most ardent of his admirers in their fiery Hungarian wine, a poor bear-driver timidly appeared on the threshold of the room, and humbly solicited the honour of adding to the enjoyment of the company by exhibiting his well-trained animal.

There was a cry of recognition from the musician. He jumped up, and in his haste threw the glass on the floor so that it broke into a thousand pieces. The next moment he and the poor bear-driver were in each other's arms, crying for joy, and calling one another the tenderest names of never-to-be-forgotten childhood.

"Eljen! Eljen!" cried the spectators, clapping their hands and laughing until the tears ran down their handsome dark faces and black beards: and one of them, filling two bumpers with some wine, approached and proposed that the two should join him in drinking their own healths. The whole company, following his example, quaffed to the happy meeting of two long-separated friends. Even the bear, who hearing the applause and taking it for the signal to enter upon the scene, had made his full appearance in the room and was made to drink wine: a command to which he yielded with much good grace, like the civilised bear he was.

The noble Hungarian is emotional, and, easily touched by any display of feeling, enters with his whole heart into demonstrations of sympathy and affection.

When the excitement had somewhat subsided, a performance of a most unusual kind began—such as had not yet been heard or witnessed by mortal eye or ear in Hungary.

The musician, with his superb touch, played his grandest airs, the same that he had played in Pesth before the King and Queen (the Emperor and Empress of Austria are King and Queen of Hungary), and the bear, intoxicated with wine, encouraged by music and applause, began jumping and tumbling about in the most grotesque manner, whilst his master himself could not resist the temptation of putting his feet into the quick motion of a Csárdás.* The enthusiasm of the public was at its height, and broke out from time to time in long cheers, applause, and shouts of "Eljen, Eljen!" And when at last the bear, fatigued and exhausted, of his own accord took off his plumed hat and presented it around for a pittance, a storm of acclamation arose, and a shower of coins and paper-money rained into it. The poor bear-owner had never achieved such a success before, had

* Csardas: the National Dance of the Hungarians.

never dreamt of it; and he was greatly astounded when the musician refused to accept his share of the harvest.

The next morning they left the inn together, and after an hour's walk on the dusty road, we meet them engaged in confidential talk. They heed not the dust clouds, which shut them out from each other's view, nor the scorching sun—they are diving into the refreshing well-spring of remembrance.

They talk of their youthful impressions, of the experience of after life, of their various achievements since the day of their separation.

When Guila, in narrating the vicissitudes of his career, comes to the time of his settling in Szegedin, there is something in his voice which makes his comrade draw close to him, and look straight into his face. "Ah!" he exclaims, "is it the old story—a pair of fine eyes?"

"But such eyes!" returns Guila. "There are no such eyes in the whole world!"

"Well?"

"Well—it is hopeless!"

"Never say that, Guila. Nothing in all the world is hopeless."

"Her father will not consent to our marriage."

"Then take her away without it," said the son of the heath.

"That would never do," answered the more civilised musician. "The sweet girl would follow me fast enough—but my honour, my reputation as an artist, would not admit of such a step. And where could I hide my love and myself? My fiddle would betray us anywhere."

"Take her into far-off countries, where people would enjoy and appreciate thy music without enquiring too closely into the history of thy runaway marriage."

"Extra Hungariam non est vita," declaimed Guila. And: "Si est vita non est ita!" struck in János, who, although unlearned himself, knew the favourite Latin proverbs and phrases of his country and their meaning by heart. "No, no! I know best. My bear and I, we have been all over Europe. No, there is no country like Hungary!"

"I have seen the first cities of the world," put in Guila, "but I would rather live in the poorest hamlet in Hungary than in the most luxurious place out of my country."

"Guila, tell me the whole story."

"Listen," said Guila, after a moment's pause. "She is the rose of roses, the star of stars. She is the daughter of an innkeeper of Szegedin. Thou knowest the pride and arrogance of the Hungarians, their prejudice against our race: the man is poor and of no position, yet were I to go to him with all the wealth of the earth, he would not give me his child."

"And the girl herself?"

"Ah, she loves me!" cried Guila, with glistening eyes.

"That is the chief thing."

"My sweet blossom!" Guila went on rapturously; "my adored Klonka! But," he added sadly, "her father has chosen another husband for her!"

"She will not have him."

"I am sure she will not!—but—what can she do?—if she does not take this one, she must some day take another. She has been waiting two years for my sake already—she will soon be eighteen, an age at which in these parts a girl must be married. The flower of Szegedin must not be pointed and laughed at as a woman who became an old maid because she loved one of the gipsy race."

"No, no, no! An old maid? we must win her before there is danger of that."

"I tell myself the same thing—night and day I think of it—but I do not see my way. In the meantime my position becomes more unpleasant from day to day. The man's sole object in life seems to be to drive me from this place by doing me every imaginable injury. He invents one story after another to my prejudice; whenever we meet accidentally he provokes me by word and deed; he has forbidden my crossing his threshold; and his last offence is—and canst thou believe it?—he actually dares to hint at my being connected with sundry robberies committed at his house?"

The humbler brother could believe it, though he did not say so; he had not yet climbed to a step of the social ladder that lifted him above suspicion of any kind. But he was wroth notwithstanding, and shaking his fist exclaimed, "The rascal!"

"He does his best to make me out a dangerous character," continued Guila, "and I begin to reap the fruit of his slander. I have already met with distrust from different quarters. Of what use to me now that I meet with kind receptions in lordly castles, if these petty burghers dare to expel me from their midst? Ah! how soon would I leave the place behind me for ever, if it were not the cage that holds my sweet bird! But for this reason I am rooted to the spot."

"Dost thou see her sometimes?"

"Scarcely ever. Her father and pretended lover keep close watch over her!"

"Could I not take her a message from thee?"

"Ah, brother, thou readest my thoughts!"

Upon which the brothers sat down by the dusty road to scheme and plan; and when at last they rose again, Guila went on by himself into the town, whilst János, lingering on the road, followed at some distance.

Half-an-hour later János and his bear had reached the first houses of the straggling suburb, and before long the ensign of the "Golden Bear" presented itself to their view.

"It is a good sign," János muttered to himself, or rather to the

bear that kept him company. "The house looks substantial—but of a low order—a poor place after all. Well, we have not been used to grand hotels—have we, Master Bruin?—and in spite of its humbleness Guila says we shall be refused. But we are rich to-day, and can set up as gentlemen. Our purse is heavier than it ever was before."

The front entrance stood wide open and there was no one about. The gipsy and his four-footed companion dared not enter unannounced as any other guest might have done. Our travellers wandered round to the kitchen door.

A young girl leaned against the door-post. "That must be Klonka," thought János. "What other girl on earth could be so beautiful!"

A form and face of pure Hungarian style, raven hair, falling in two thick plaits far below her knees, setting off a clear, oriental complexion, matched with finely arched eyebrows and silky eyelashes that swept her cheek. He could not see her eyes, as she kept them on the ground. The whole attitude of the figure betrayed weariness of mind. The travellers had crept up so softly that they remained unnoticed for some time. After having admired her to his heart's content János at last spoke, and startled the maiden out of her sad reverie. Her eyes flashed up, and János comprehended now why Guila called them his stars.

The girl gave a start, but at the first look at the stranger a softer expression stole into her beautiful face. Did she remember that her beloved once belonged to the same despised race as the poor bear-leader? She had a mind to warn the humble traveller off her father's threshold before a collision with the latter took place; every scene of the kind caused pain to her loving heart. But the gipsy put his finger to his lips as if to enjoin silence; then, drawing a step nearer, whispered the one word—"Guila!"

The girl's face lighted up. At that word life and animation returned to her languid form; her eyes, recently filled with hot, burning tears, now sparkled, and her rosy lips showed two rows of precious pearls.

"Ah, a bear!" cried she, loud enough to be heard indoors; "how delightful!" Instantly an old woman appeared in the door, a reprimand in her face and bearing.

"Don't scold, Mariska," said the young girl gaily, to the old servant, who, since her mother's death—as long ago as she remembered—had held sway in her father's house. "This is not an ordinary gipsy like the others: he comes from far countries. And see, he has a bear with him; only look at it! Won't it be fun to see it dance!" and she laughed a light, silvery laugh, which entirely softened the heart of her old nurse. "Father!" she cried suddenly, flying off to meet a burly old man, who now approached with a threatening countenance and gesture, the meaning of which was not to be mistaken; "only think—a bear! it is so long since we had anything of the kind in our rooms!"

János, who remained humbly standing in the yard outside the kitchen-door, now encouraged his companion to begin a performance which drove the girl into pretended raptures. "Only think how this will fill our house to-night," she cried. "Think, father, of the bad times we have had lately, and consider what an attraction the bear will prove."

At this juncture János, noticing a slight wavering in the fierce man's resolution—as a true son of his race he knew how to read human countenances—advanced, holding a handful of silver florins up to view.

"How many of these," he asked, "for a night's rest at your hotel?" The innkeeper over the way wanted to engage us for to-night, but I preferred your house and the society which will be sure to assemble in your rooms."

The old man listened to this flattery apparently unmoved. Still, in spite of his effort to the contrary, his eyes *would* wander up and down between the shining coins and his lovely daughter. Covetousness and parental affection together worked strongly in favour of the gipsy's proposal.

It was so long since his only child had expressed an interest in anything, whatever it might be. The wish to please her, and the desire to see the discomfiture of the competitor over the way, assisted in conquering his antipathy to the stranger's race.

"And wilt thou promise to be gay and happy, to laugh and dance as merrily as thou wast wont in former times if I give in to thy fancy?" asked he, addressing his daughter. "Wilt thou promise to dance with István and be friendly with him?"

"I will dance with István, and smile upon whomsoever you like."

"Well, then, for this once in my life I'll swerve from my principles. This man seems to come from afar, and maybe he has no connection with the gang in our neighbourhood."

Accordingly János and his four-footed friend, as unsuspicious characters, were allowed to take quarters at the Golden Bear. A shed at the back of the house was appointed for János' residence, whilst one of the large and numerous pig-sties next to it was emptied for the accommodation of Master Bruin.

"When and where can I talk to thee?" whispered János, passing Klonka on his way to his apartments.

"When the first stars begin to twinkle—yonder behind those stables," the girl answered under her breath, looking another way.

Slowly, much too slowly for Klonka's impatience, the sun wandered towards the west. Nowhere else except on a wide expanse of ground can the sunrise and sunset be of the same indescribably powerful effect. Nature awakes on the plain, at the first faint shades of eve, from a state of torpor into a strange, fantastic life. And sweet twilight lingeringly hovers for hours over the smiling earth, as if loth to

quit her in her newly-revealed beauty, whilst night begins reluctantly to unfold her starry mantle in the skies. Every bush, every leaf even, every herb seems endowed with a thousandfold life. There goes a hum and a buzz over the heath of millions of shining insects; the twitter of small birds, the cry of other birds of prey, the neighing of horses, all the peculiar sounds of the animal world, mingle into a glad hymn of thankfulness; and above the general hallelujah of soulless creation arise the sounds of the human voice, or the long-drawn tunes of the fiddle.

Towns and villages, lonely Csárdás or huts scattered on the heath, are all astir. Handsome, gaily gesticulating figures grace every doorway and window, fill the squares and broad streets with ringing sounds of speech, song, and laughter; life and animation meet your eye and ear on all sides.

And as the evening advances, every inn, in town or village, every lonely Csárdá is alive with the sounds of the gipsy music; the wild, sad-gay melodies of the national Csárdás are wafted along on the silent wings of the still night far over the heath, and attract light young feet to the places of assembly.

A Hungarian festival requires no preparation. Whenever two or three young people happen to meet on the dancing ground, it would go strangely against their nature to withstand the inviting sound of the fiddle and keep their lithesome limbs from rhythmical motion. But when there is a crowd, the entertainment soon takes the character of a feast, which in any other country would take weeks of planning and preparation, without perhaps coming off in the same thoroughly successful manner. We need not say that the company thus thrown together by chance is often mixed up of very different elements; nor will the reader be astonished by our confession that not infrequently, especially in times when, for one reason or another, the national blood is up, these social gatherings come to a disastrous ending. But this only adds to the zest of the enjoyment.

Klonka was as good as her word. As soon as the first stars began feebly to twinkle in the darkening sky, the first guests, attracted by the tuning of the fiddles, had arrived, and her father was consequently occupied—she slipt out of the house, and, like a roseleaf carried away by the evening breeze, ran towards the place of appointment; a secluded spot behind the last of the outbuildings squaring in the large yard, where a garrulous rivulet sped swiftly past on its way to the Theiss.

The sound of the fiddle followed Klonka and accelerated her flying steps as she ran from the house. With almost the same excitement as if it had been her own lover, she sprang towards the poor gipsy, who was anxiously awaiting her arrival—she trembled with eagerness to hear tidings of him whom her young soul adored beyond anything in this world. János satisfied her by remitting to her all the love-

vows his friend had charged him with; adding—as he had carte blanche to do—a good deal of his own consoling wisdom, and received in return the girl's unaffected protestations of true, unchanging love for his friend.

He exhorted her to be patient and to wait, assuring her that Guila and himself would not rest until ways and means should be found to bring the union about.

The girl listened to his words, hoped and believed in them, as youth *will* hope and believe in whatever it ardently wishes for, and their conversation tended at least to strengthen and refresh the drooping floweret. With a buoyant step and glowing cheeks, she soon afterwards entered the large room of the inn, gently driving the brown bear before her, and playfully introducing him as her latest friend to the assembled guests.

The performance began; János playing on the cymbal, and the bear danced and performed a series of curious tricks, to the great edification of the circle of bystanders, who were not sparing of their applause.

The loud cheers and laughter within attracted fresh arrivals from the street; soon the rooms were crowded, doors and windows stocked with inquisitive heads. Many who had been bound to the inn over the way changed their course and steered for the Golden Bear. The enjoyment was general; beer, wine, and brandy flowing liberally, and the innkeeper was in unwonted high spirits. To crown his delight, his child, who lately had been so woe-begone and tearful, looked as gay and happy as she had used to look in her merriest days, showering her fiery glances and delighted smiles lavishly around her. She had changed her neglected undress of the morning for the full, well-fitting national costume—a costume bringing out her well proportioned figure to the greatest advantage.

Not the least fiery of Klonka's admirers in this crowd was István, the pretender to her hand. He was not a bad fellow to look at; a good specimen of the true Hungarian type; and had Klonka's heart not been taken out of her keeping before István's courtship began, she might not have looked with such aversion at the union contemplated by her father.

The innkeeper had set his heart upon the match, and no wonder; for István, besides a very favourable exterior, possessed the respect of everybody. He enjoyed all the honours due to success in this world. István's heirloom had consisted of a dilapidated hut on the heath, a little way out of Szegedin, and nothing more. After having served his time in the king's army, he took possession of it, borrowed some money of a friend of his, in order to buy a couple of pigs, and upon this small foundation he built up his fortune in no time. He got on marvellously. In a few short years his pigs numbered several thousands; he rode a fine, noble steed when inspecting his live stock, which represented a fortune, and drove to market in a superior

cabriolet drawn by two small Hungarian thoroughbred horses. His house had been rebuilt and considerably enlarged, and he had secured a licence for keeping a public-house, only waiting to open it until he should bring home a bride. In the meantime small but very gay entertainments of a half private, half public character frequently took place at his house, and his popularity was increasing every day. No wonder, therefore, that the comparatively poor innkeeper of the Golden Bear should consider the young man as the most suitable husband for his daughter and son-in-law for himself.

The bear had closed his performance by making his round amidst shouts of merriment and laughter, hat in paw, to collect coins—whilst his master finished off the séance by some of his most clever conjuring tricks—and had been reconducted to his shed in the back yard, and delivered over to his well-earned rest: and the entertainment took its course. János was now quietly sitting on a wooden settle near the door, watching the dancers.

The night was far on. Windows and doors stood wide open to coax the outside freshness into the over-heated rooms. The fiddles and cymbals whined and laughed, sang and shrieked alternately, now in overwhelming exultation, now in woe-begone misery; the ball was at its climax—when János's ear suddenly caught a shrill sound piercing through the still night air. Those in the room could not hear it.

János listened attentively; the quick ear of his nation could not be mistaken in that sound. There it was again! a cry, more desperate, more terrible than the first.

He approached the master, and beckoned him to the door.

"The cry of a night-bird," said the innkeeper indifferently, half turning away.

"It's a human cry," dissented János. "There again! It is the cry of some one in danger."

"And what is this to thee or me?" inquired Klonka's father fiercely, thinking that if he were to look up every fellow who in that neighbourhood got himself into a scrape he would have much to do.

"But it is on your premises," insisted János. "It sounds desperate to me. Suppose a murder is being committed here?"

The old man's fat face blanched. "Don't alarm the guests," he said. "Where is István?"

But István not turning up at the moment, the master, unwilling to make a greater stir than was necessary, singled one or two of the most sturdy fellows out of the crowd, and beckoned to them to follow him quietly out of doors.

They all heard the shrieks, now like a feeble wail, now like a wild shout; armed themselves with lanterns, sticks and pitchforks; and marched in the direction of the sounds, followed by old Mariska and the young servant-girl, who would not on any account be left behind.

But when they neared the stables, it was János's turn to look blank. With the shrieks and shouts a low grunting was mingling, not

unknown to the bear-driver; and an idea of the true state of affairs flashed upon him.

"Caution!" he said, motioning the rest of them back from the stable door. "I must go in first. I believe that someone has got into mischief with the bear. And serve him right," he added, under his breath, "if he went in to tamper with him."

Accordingly he passed on first, lantern in hand, closely followed by the group, armed with sticks and hay-forks.

"Help, help! for mercy's sake, help!"

They stood on the threshold of the stable, the aspect of the scene inside paralyzing their movements in the first moment. There in the background of his compartment, ordinarily reserved for the pigs, stood the huge brown bear, erect on hind legs, holding in his firm embrace something which looked like a human form and which certainly was endowed with a human voice—a voice which, hoarse from sheer exhaustion, kept crying out for help in agonized terror.

One moment was enough to take in the scene, the next the men rushed forward. But János stopped them, shrieking out almost as wildly as the agonized man in the bear's embrace himself.

"Don't touch him! At the first stroke he would crush the man's bones as if they were chaff, and knock one or two of you down in addition. I alone can manage him. But," continued he, raising his voice, "first of all we must know what brought the fellow into the bear's den. Aha!" lighting with his lantern the adjacent sty, "the secret is out! Look!"

A number of pigs muzzled and with legs tied, all ready to be carried off, were lying on the ground of several sties—a sight which drove the innkeeper almost crazy with rage. With a tremendous oath, he roared out: "Catch him! hold him! strike him down! It is the thief of my pigs who for years has robbed me without allowing himself to be caught! Don't let him escape! hold him fast!"

"Run for the police," shrieked old Mariska at the top of her cracked voice, seconded by the young girl in the treble.

The unfortunate man's entreaty to deliver him out of his cruel position was drowned in the general uproar. The tumult increased when the guests indoors, apprised by the servant-girl of the fact that a robber had been caught, came pouring into the back yard. The neighbourhood awoke out of its quiet slumbers, windows and doors were flung open, the streets quickly filled with excited people pressing eagerly in the direction of the Golden Bear.

Neither last nor least amongst those hastening to the place of action were two gensdarmes mounted on horseback, whilst from another side a commissary of police, accompanied by two policemen, approached more deliberately on foot.

The thief was languishing all the while in a most unenviable position, and but for the hopeful words whispered to him by kind-hearted János, who perhaps remembered how many of his own tribe

had fallen into a similar predicament (as far as picking other people's property and being detected in the act went, although the means of securing the culprit might have been less original) would probably have been dead from sheer fright before the arrival of the authorities.

"Shall I loosen his bonds?" asked János humbly of the commissary; "he can't bear this much longer."

"Presently," said the commissary; and, turning to the bear's prisoner: "First tell me what thou hast come here for?"

"To steal pigs, of course!" answered the thief—and if such a thing could have been believed of a man in his position, one might have fancied that he actually chuckled into the bear's fur at the naiveté of the question.

"Hast thou done so before?"

"Many a time," was the proud answer.

"How often may it have happened in this particular house?"

"I will tell you everything," howled the exasperated man, "if you will only deliver me out of the grasp of this horrible beast. I am bruised—crushed; there is not a bone left unbroken in my body—I believe I am dying!"

The commissary made a sign, and János, stroking and patting the bear on the head and neck, spoke to him in language of his own, which in this assembly no one besides himself understood.

The bear looked lovingly at his master, then suddenly loosening his grasp as if by a strong effort, he opened his arms wide and his prisoner fell in a powerless heap. He was raised to his feet and, supported on each side by a policeman, led forth from the stable. As it turned out later, he was not hurt; the bear had held him carefully in his embrace, pressing him closely to his soft bosom without injury to his bones or flesh, waiting until human justice should take the culprit out of his hands. It was fright alone which for the time had quite unmanned one of the sturdiest fellows of the wide, wide Puszta; and those who have never known what it is to want to steal a pig and to light upon a bear instead ought not to speak too rashly with reference to that particular young man's courage.

As the captured robber passed into the light of many lanterns inquisitively raised to his face, the master of the house reeled and staggered back, a livid hue spreading over his contorted features.

"István!" he gasped.

Before the earliest dawn of the new morning, János and his bear had taken themselves off, sans adieu. Two bright silver florins lying conspicuously on the poor straw bed in the stable, were the only tokens of remembrance they had left behind them. When his residence was wanted, he was sought for; but—catch a gipsy, if you can! The earth might as well have swallowed them, for all the news they could get of János and his bear.

But although the couple had dissolved into the air or sunk into the

ground, to all purpose and appearance, János found ways and means to put Guila into possession of the facts.

The artist had the evening before sped by rail to Buda-Pesth. But putting all professional thoughts in the background, he, on hearing the news, steamed back to Szegedin as fast as an express would take him, and went straight down to the forbidden ground—the inn of the Golden Bear. There he found matters at a climax.

The master of the Golden Bear had long been much lower down in the world than he would have cared people to know. Until now he had succeeded in keeping his creditors at arms' length by showing to them a perspective vista leading to a rich son-in-law. When the son-in-law turned out to be a robber, and the poor deluded man had been felled by a stroke of apoplexy at the terrible discovery, they all came down upon him for their money.

All pretence was at an end; he felt he could do nothing but die. He hoped he would die and not live to see those harpies clutch his house and fields from him, and send him and his poor child adrift on the world.

Guila offered his help, nobly, fully, unconditionally, whilst Klonka knelt at her father's bedside imploring him to sanction her union with her lover.

Although on the brink of death and ruin, of impending beggary for his only child, the man could not be persuaded to give a full and free consent to the marriage of his daughter with a son of the despised race: it went too much against the grain. When at last he could bring his unwilling lips to utter the hard words, he gave his consent on condition that the musician should take his bride away without his knowledge, lest he should repent of his word and at the last moment prevent the marriage ceremony from taking place.

In the meantime, István's trial took its course. Innumerable robberies, small and great, were brought home to him, and he did not take the slightest trouble to deny the charges. On the contrary; once well-assured that his game was up, he seemed to enjoy startling Court and auditory by new revelations of misdeeds no one dreamt of accusing him with. Confession followed confession; until people began to think that he invented half of the adventures he related, in order to invest himself with a halo somewhat equal to that of those famous robbers his countrymen are so proud of.

He was sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

Klonka's father did not die. At Christmas time he was about his business again; but he looked an aged, broken man, with a settled expression of disappointment on his wrinkled face.

And one fine Sunday morning—the Sunday after Epiphany—Klonka, going to church as usual, clad in her best, approached her father to salute him by a kiss on his hand before starting, as she had been wont to do on every Sunday of her young life from earliest childhood upwards.

To-day, however, she seemed to linger over this little ceremony of filial devotion, and as she bent over his hand two hot tears fell upon it. The old man withdrew his hand, and put it silently upon the fair young head by way of a mute benediction. None of them spoke, but they understood each other.

Klonka left the house, throwing many a yearning glance back towards the old homestead. At her side walked old Mariska in her full-blown Sunday stateliness; a little way further on they were joined by two bridesmaids, and the rest of the bridal party were assembled at the church porch. They entered the church, a stately procession. A large congregation witnessed the marriage of Klonka and the musician, who, obedient to the father's instructions, had prepared their marriage without talking about it in the old man's hearing, in order to enable him to keep up the pretence of not knowing what was going on.

Contrary to the general rule, there was no feast after the ceremony. A carriage was waiting at the porch, which conveyed the young pair from the altar straight to the railway station. Guila had pitched his tent in Buda-Pesth for the time being.

There is little more to tell. Guila formed a band of chosen musicians, with whom he made the tour of Europe more than once. His fame increased, travelled before him, and led him on even to America. His wife and, in time, two dark-eyed, glossy-haired children accompanied him wherever he went. They were supremely happy; the only drawback to their felicity being Klonka's ardent wish to see her father, Mariska, and the old home of her childhood again. The old man sent her kind messages, but never an invitation to come and see him; nor did he express a wish to see his grandchildren. However, the time to hasten to his side unbidden was not far off. Yet Klonka's wish could not be gratified in all its parts; her eyes were never to behold the dear old homestead again.

When the Theiss, capriciously inclined at all times, one night took it into its head to play the unconscious people of Szegedin the malicious trick of swallowing them up in their sleep, the old inn of the Golden Bear was washed down its insatiable throat, together with many edifices of all descriptions.

Guila, family and band were just travelling home from their American tour, when the sad news reached them and accelerated their movements.

A modern hotel is being erected in the place of the old inn, and we see Klonka's children running in and out of the nearly finished rooms and corridors, as if they meant in the future to be very much at home in their grandfather's new house. The grandfather is fond of them; but to his dying day he will never quite get over the galling truth that his own grandchildren should grow up as living likenesses of his son-in-law.

MIA—MAI.

VERY, very strange!
Such a tiny word—and such a little change!
Only one small letter moveth from its place—
On the heart a shadow resteth,
Creepeth o'er the face.

What displaced the letter—in what ill-starred hour?
Cruel little letter, with its quiet power!
Perhaps a thought outspoken, perhaps a hope unsaid:
Skills it much whose hand has gathered,
When the flower lies dead?
Come back, little letter; weary with dull aching,
I would dream one foolish hour—bear the stern awaking:—
So:—the summer evening, and the guarded bay;
And the forms we watched, for hopes and fears,
In the mingling gold and grey:
And the pausing, deep heart-converse,
When few, the words were said:
For unheard voices talked with ours,
Around, and overhead.
From the awakening star-worlds,
And from the sleeping sea—
Thought-whispers of the unrevealed,
Brought to us silently:—
And the quiet pressure of a wrist,
On that open casement laid;
To whose bracelet clasp of amethyst
Our curious fancies strayed—

Tread them down more strongly!
Rebel thoughts that rise:
Foolish things are trembling lips
And misty eyes.

Go back, little letter; since the night must be—
Clouds come o'er the starlight, darkness on the sea:
Night, that hath no twilight,
Can know no dawn of day;
Till, in the calm "for ever"
Passeth thy power away!

S. G. P.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THEY KNEW THAT THEY WERE PARTING FOR EVER.

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

BY ISABELLA FYVIE MAYO.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DEAD LIVING.

IN the Hotel at Ragan, at the door of the chamber which had just been opened to him, stood Edgar Vivian, pale and terror-stricken. It was no ghost's face that confronted him, though it looked worn and ghastly as one; but it was the face of a man whom Edgar had believed to be dead—the face of Allan Grale.

Young Vivian staggered back. "Oh, Allan, how can this be?" he cried. "They found your body, as was thought, in the Dark Pool; they mourn you as dead. I have been silently, I may almost say openly, accused of killing you!"

"Come in," said Allan, in deep, hollow tones. "Come in and sit down."

That was all his greeting. He drew his old friend into the room, pushed a chair towards him, and stood in gloomy silence, gazing at his unexpected guest.

"Allan," repeated Edgar, "how could you do this?"

"What is it that I have done?" demanded Allan Grale. "I know nothing. I have closed my ears to all possible news from Dering since I left it."

'Yet you bade me send on your box to Corrabuin!"

"I scarcely knew what I did or said," replied Allan. "But I thought it might spare you some trouble to get rid of that box. I have never called for it. I suppose it is there still."

"No," said Edgar. "Your father somehow got word of it—not through me; and it is in his possession."

Allan Grale made a sudden movement of his hand towards his head, as one stricken. "Do you know now what was in that box?" he enquired.

"No."

"Does Maria?"

"Maria never even knew I had it, until that fact was brought out at the inquest over what was supposed to be your body," said Edgar, simply. "After that, she knew what I knew—little enough."

"Of course Maria has told you now what she knows!"

"Maria has told me literally nothing," declared Edgar. "She wanted very much to see you herself, and it was by her wish I made that appointment with you at the Black Pool. She was to be there with me, Allan. Of course you had the note, making the appointment?"

"Aye, but I did not keep the appointment, Edgar, because I kept an earlier one at the Black Pool; an appointment for the very afternoon when you left your note. And out of that appointment there grew another, to be held at the same place on the same night, which ended everything."

Edgar gazed in dismay. The speaker had sprung from his chair and was pacing the room like a wild man.

"And so they found my body, did they!" cried he in a terrible whisper. "I wonder how it was Maria never saw that?"

Edgar kept silence. The shock had almost stunned him. He found Allan Grale where he had expected to find a Mr. Smith. It must have been Allan who had married Morna!

Allan spoke again, with a strangely chilling apathy. "I wrought evil and misery everywhere," he said, "by trying to hide my misdoings, to conceal the fact that I was a thief and a forger. But at least I can be candid now. I am also a murderer, Edgar—a murderer!"

There ensued an awful silence.

"Don't you hear, Edgar? Why do you stay in the room with me? You will find some men below, and stout cords to bind me. Go, and bring them."

Surely his mind is giving way, thought young Vivian.

"Nay," Allan went on, as if divining his thoughts. "I have already concealed my crime so long that it has cost another life! Why would Morna, in her divine pity, love me and marry me? I told her she had better not; I told her I had had a past life of storm and sin; but I did not tell her the truth of my blood-guiltiness. And when she was my wife, and, despite my silence, her pure soul received the image of the scene at the Black Pool, which ever haunted her husband's mind, and her innocent lips murmured the agony of remorse which he stifled within him, they called her—mad!"

"Why, Grale—Allan, what are you talking about?" exclaimed Edgar, pulling his wits together with a strong effort. "As you have heard nothing from Dering since you left it, what do you know about the mystery of the Black Pool, and the dead body which everyone said was yours."

The unhappy man looked at him with those strange, wild eyes. "Did you know I had a cousin?" he asked. "You may have heard my mother speak of her sister, Mrs. Gibson, and your brother George

saw her when he went with me to my aunt's house—the school-house at Savoch. George said something to me afterwards which made me wonder whether Aunt Gibson had let out anything to him about her son. George seemed to know there was something wrong at Savoch. So you never heard of Aunt Marget's son, Abel Gibson?"

"No," said Edgar, quietly. "What about him?"

Allan was again walking fiercely to and fro. "Abel Gibson was my evil genius: that is all. And how can I even say that in my own excuse now—now that he is dead—dead by my hand? You tell me that a dead body has been found in the Black Pool; then it is the body of my cousin, Abel Gibson."

"Let me hear all," said Edgar, laying his compassionate hand upon the trembling arm.

"Yes, he has been my evil genius," went on Allan. "I may say as much to you—to Maria's brother—if to no one else. To begin with, he preyed upon my boyish sympathies; he was a year or so older than I, and that, in youth, makes a difference. He was also bigger, more advanced, more masterful; anyway, I loved him. Later, when we were young men, he came to me in trouble—outcast, outlawed. Reprobate, too, but that I suspected not. Naturally, with the impulsive instinct of youth, I sided with the young against the old. I heard him utter vows, and saw him shed tears of sentimental repentance—maudlin repentance I should call it now. By his specious wiles, which I detected not, he drew me utterly into his toils. And while he was opening up for me his own evil ways, which for me he caused to wear a most attractive glamour,—his betting, his gambling, his riotous living, I——well, I fell unconsciously, step by step, into them. Soon I was not one whit better than he, except in hypocrisy, though I was still rich and respected, while he was shunned and forgotten. We were speedily in difficulties together—difficulties which Abel looked to me to make straight, but which the means at my command were quite inadequate to meet. We had recourse to money-lenders and such helpers, with results, Edgar, of which even you have some experience."

"Is this what Maria knew?" asked Edgar.

"Ah!" said Allan, as if stung, "she knew more than that! About last Christmas twelvemonth, nearly two years ago now, when we were in terrible straits, in an evil hour I chanced to go into my mother's bedroom, and saw her jewel-case open on the table. She had been putting up her diamond cross, which she had worn on Christmas Day, and was called away to see some visitor in haste, whom my father had brought in. While I waited, for I wanted to speak to her, I looked into the case, meaning no harm. I opened one of the little boxes; there lay the beautiful diamond cross, worth, I knew, some hundreds of pounds. The devil was at my elbow, Edgar. He put into my mind the thought that it was only a toy, which she scarcely ever used; she might not wear it again until next

Christmas Day; and if I took it, and pledged it, I could soon get it back again. I took that cross!"

Edgar could say nothing. But he went nearer to Allan, and stood beside him. It was his dumb declaration of sympathy; of pity and succour.

"I slipped the cross into my waistcoat pocket, leaving the box it had lain in and the case just as it was, and I was leaving the room when my mother came up the stairs. She saw me in the corridor, and thought I had just turned out of my own chamber, never thinking I had been in hers. She passed into her room talking to me, and I stood at the door looking in. 'Mr. Gladson, of Liverpool, is downstairs with your father, Alny,' she said—I recollect the words to this day. 'Oh, is he,' I carelessly answered; and while I spoke I saw her lock her jewel-case without examining it, and put it into the safe place where she kept it. Ah! Poor mother!"

The groan went to Edgar Vivian's heart.

"Abel Gibson pawned the cross; and from that day my doom was sealed. He never let me have a happy moment afterwards. He had obtained a hold over me, and did not scruple to use it. Maria ——"

"Was it *this* that Maria knew?" interrupted Edgar. "But how could she know it?"

"By the Fate which decrees that hidden things shall be made manifest," answered Allan, wildly. "Abel sent me the ticket when he had pledged it, and I kept it by me. I did not get up the money to redeem it as quickly as I had hoped, but it was ready at last. On the very day when I was about to send the ticket back to Abel—just as I believed I had got all my wrong-doing set straight, and had made a firm resolve to be wiser—it ended in my handing to Maria the envelope which contained the ticket and a few compromising words, instead of a little note I had written to her. I had misdirected the envelopes, you see. I remember your sister's happy face as I slipped the note into her hand. It was at a garden party at the Court. She was standing under the cedar tree, for summer was then setting in. I remember the very ivy leaves she wore at her throat, ——and I never saw Maria's face happy again. She sent me back the note and the ticket next day, folded in a sheet of paper on which she had written 'The way of transgressors is hard.' Of course she understood it all. That was what divided us, Edgar."

"She did not understand about the—the bills and the forgeries?" spoke Edgar, in a low tone.

"She suspected. As soon as she heard about them, instinct told her it must be my work.—The way of transgressors is indeed hard," continued Allan. "Before I could get the cross redeemed I found that the money provided for it was used for something else. Abel Gibson, always in new troubles of his own, came to me with a confession that he had been obliged to apply it to purposes of his own.

Troubles thickened, Edgar. Goaded on by him, not knowing which way to turn, I at length listened to his insidious promptings, and *created* money by using my father's name. It was to benefit him, not me; I declare that; though indeed I had been obliged to make his obligations mine. He it was who did all the active part of the fraud: put the bills in circulation, presented the cheques, and ——"

"Allan, I should have told the truth to my father!"

"I wish I had. I have wished it a hundred times. But I hoped to put things right myself. I got the cross back in my possession, but when George and I were starting on our trip to Scotland, I had not found the opportunity of replacing it in my mother's jewel-case. It seemed impossible to get at her keys. So I stored it away in that oriental box for safety, in which were already hidden other dangerous things—papers that would prove me to be the guilty man in regard to the forgeries."

"How came you to use the name 'Mark Bedell,' in those forgeries, throwing the suspicion on Charles Carr?" asked Edgar, in a low tone.

"I never did," said Allan, vehemently. "That is, I never did it consciously. How it came about, I cannot tell with certainty. When I was drawing out the first false bill, the name, 'Mark Bedell,' came into my head—just as Charles Carr said afterwards, the name, as a hero for his story, came into his. I did not know that anything suggested it to me. I did not remember any association with it. Later, when it appeared that the names were identical, I could only think that I must have seen the name on some paper in Charles's desk, perhaps in the manuscript itself; but I declare that I was, and am, utterly unconscious of it. It may even be that I, in some moment of carelessness, left the name in my desk, and that Charles saw it, and unconsciously took it up. I cannot tell how it was. When my father was instituting a search to discover the perpetrator of the forgeries, and spoke of calling in the aid of a detective, I grew afraid the oriental box might have to be visited amidst other things if the search extended to our house; and I asked you to take charge of it. The papers I have mentioned were in the box, as well as the diamond cross."

"I must ask you a question, Allan, for myself," said Edgar, speaking impulsively. "When I told your father—as I had to tell—that you had kindly lent me fifty pounds, he said I had written a note requesting a loan of a second fifty: how was that?"

"Ah," groaned Allan, "I was fast in the toils then. I had had news from my cousin Abel that he was again on his way to Dering; that money he must have, and that he could make no move for himself, as he found detectives were zealously pursuing inquiries relative to the Mark Bedell frauds. My father, I suppose, had then put the detectives in motion. Fifty pounds Abel said he must have, and without loss of time. I had not got it; and I wrote

that note, Edgar, imitating your hand-writing, which I could do well. But it did not answer; my father refused the loan, and I had to go to meet Abel without the money. We met at the place he had appointed—the woods near the Dark Pool. It was the afternoon that you called at Moorland House, and left that note in pencil for me. I took with me a parcel for Charles Carr, which I meant to leave at Dr. Palmer's, to account for how I had spent my afternoon, if any chance question were asked at dinner-time."

Edgar Vivian was listening breathlessly.

"I found Abel different from what I had ever seen him before. I think he felt himself a desperate man, taking his last throw in life. He told me that he believed our detection was close at hand; that he felt almost sure the detectives had traced a connection between us, and that, for his part, if I failed to secure him the means of escape, he should declare the truth. I saw Abel in his true light that afternoon, and I felt myself completely at his mercy. He told me, in a sort of insolent boast, that he had stolen General Vivian's spade guinea. It seems that he had come to Dering unexpectedly, the afternoon of the General's fall, hoping to get to see me, and passed the General when he was lying in the road. Bending down to raise him, he caught sight of the spade guinea attached to the watch-chain, and the impulse to take it overpowered him: it meant money. He could not do anything, he found, to restore the General to consciousness, and went out of Dering the way he had come, without seeing me, first telling a boy he met to run for assistance for the fallen man. That guinea he pledged at once, Edgar, at the shop on the Carstow Road. I cannot tell you how I felt when he told me this shameful thing. Forging was bad enough; but to rob an unconscious, perhaps a dying man, was horrible. I had a little loose cash in my pocket, and I gave it him, bidding him go at once and redeem the guinea, and I promised to meet him at the Black Pool in the evening, and to bring some money with me to enable him to get away, if I could by any means procure it. I had thought, you see, that perhaps I might get it from my mother. However, I was frustrated in that, for she and Mary Anne had gone to Lady Laura Bond's, and stayed there."

"Did you leave the parcel with Charles Carr?"

"No. I had not time. I slipped it into my pocket and took it home with me. I dined alone. Directly afterwards I went out again to meet Abel at the Black Pool, as arranged. The hour named was eight, and he kept me waiting there till ten. I dared not leave the spot lest, if he came just too late, he might at once carry out all the threats he had hurled at me. I feared, too, lest his delay might be involuntarily due to his arrest! Presently I began to marvel what reception I might get from my father if I went home and Abel's surmises were correct. Edgar, I had two hours of fever and delirium. Now I sat on the cold earth,—then I wandered to and

fro. I took Carr's parcel from my pocket, and mechanically stripped away its wrappings, just because I could not keep my fingers still. It contained the watchmaker's hammer, which I had borrowed from him."

"Ah!" exclaimed Edgar.

"When Abel came he was in a fearful temper. I think he had been drinking. A smart shower began to fall, and we went under the trees. He instantly demanded my light overcoat, which I was wearing, saying I had plenty of clothes to change when I got home, while he had none—neither home nor clothes. I let him have it, and he put it on. I felt half afraid of him. He took the spade guinea out of his pocket, tauntingly showed it to me, and said he should not give it up. I had to confess that I had brought no money, and I suppose that put the finishing touch to his temper, for he became like a madman, striking me a sharp blow in the face. We had a struggle; it put up my temper, and I think I was as mad as he. He wrested my stick from me and threw it behind me with a mocking laugh. I snatched the hammer from my pocket—and—and struck him with it, and then he lay motionless at my feet. And the fiend of wrath and hatred within me rose in blind strength, and I hurled him into the deep Black Pool. It was only when I heard the sullen splash of the waters that I seemed at all to know what I had done."

Allan stopped, and buried his face in his hands. Edgar sat as one dumb.

"I scarcely know how I felt—I scarcely know what I did," resumed Allan. "I remember I saw two hats lying on the ground where we had struggled, and I took up one and threw it also into the pool. I snatched up the other, and a walking-stick: his. How long I stayed there in the moonlight, not knowing what to do in the awful trouble, I cannot tell; then I went away, taking the Carstow Road."

"Dr. Palmer has always said he saw you on the road that night about twelve o'clock."

"Aye. I walked on and on without any aim, only wanting to get away, and at length I reached Sladford. There I stayed all day in concealment. I was utterly miserable; I thought I would destroy myself; and at night went into a chemist's shop to get some poison—and found that the young man in it, about to serve me, was Mark Acland. I don't think he knew me. He refused the poison, and I came away, leaving, by accident, my stick in the shop; but I would not go back for it. Then I thought of this place, Ragan; thought I would come off to it and hide myself here, instead of committing the deadly sin of taking my own life. I remembered how your brother George had once said Ragan would be just the spot to bury oneself in. And I started the next morning by train for Scotland, writing to

you, Edgar, when I got there, to send that box to Corrabuin. I sent the hammer back to its owner ——"

"Wait a moment," said Edgar. "How could you travel if you had no money?"

"I procured some. I could not have travelled without it. You know Fordham, the lawyer, who lives at Sladford: everybody knows him. He had done a little business for me at times, and had always shown himself friendly. I went to him that same night, after thinking the matter over on leaving the chemist's, and obtained an interview with him. I confided to him that I was in a small trouble (it was how I put it), and had to take a journey in connection with it; but that I had not the means, for I had not ventured to speak to my father; and I boldly asked him to lend me sixty pounds. He put some questions to me, which I answered as well as I was able, without giving any clue to the truth, and he then handed me the money—sixty pounds. I confess it was more than I had hoped for; I thought he might offer me the half of it; but I suppose he remembered my father's wealth and that I was his only son. Pledging him to keep my visit secret, which he faithfully promised to do, I left him."

"You were fortunate, Allan."

"I was. What I should have done without it, I know not. With that sum in my pocket I journeyed North, came to this hotel, and straightway had a short, sharp illness. I made acquaintance with the McOrists—the people at the farm. None of them had seen me at my previous visit, except the nephew, Colin, and I don't wonder that he did not know me again. Though he has said to me once or twice, 'At times I seem to have seen your face and heard your voice before, as if it were in a dream.'"

"You married the daughter, Morna?"

"Alas, yes! Edgar, at times I feel more remorse to think that I married such a girl as Morna, and let the shadow of my crime steal from my soul to hers, than I do for the slaying of Abel Gibson! But—she loved me. And it was so strange and so sweet to feel myself loved, as Morna loved, in my desolation. And yet I never loved her—as I loved your sister Maria!"

There was a long silence. Then Allan suddenly asked, the question striking him, how Edgar came to be at Ragan.

"I have brought back my poor sister-in-law," Edgar answered. "She chooses to live here in her widowhood."

"Your sister-in-law?—Her widowhood?" echoed Allan, utterly perplexed.

For he knew nothing of the past. He had not any idea that the pretty young woman whom he had known at the farm as Mrs. Forester was George Vivian's wife. He did not yet know that George was dead. So, just as he had recounted events to Edgar, Edgar in his turn had now to enlighten him. To hear of the death of George

affected Allan much. He buried his face in his hands, and when he looked up, his eyelashes were wet.

"And you had your own troubles, too, Edgar," he said in a kind tone; "your money difficulties."

"They have come right," said Edgar, with a flash of brightness. "Through an old college tutor, I had the chance of undertaking a heavy piece of literary compilation, and by working at it almost by night and day, I have set myself right with the world again. I used to shut myself up, denied admittance to all comers, scarcely ever went out, for the work had to be finished within a given time. People took up the notion, from this and my gloomy face—for, in truth, I was sad enough—that I was morbid and had committed all kinds of sins, if not crimes. So do our friends misjudge us!"

"You had no cause to shut yourself up," said Allan gloomily, "but I had. I am tired of it—of the anxiety, the remorse, the trouble—and now that Morna is gone I shall give myself up. I will go back to Dering with you, Edgar."

"Yes, I hope you will—but not to give yourself up. What end would it answer? and remember that your father and mother and Mary Anne are living. What would such a confession be for them? No, Allan, the mischief is bad enough as it is; you must not increase it."

The dead Morna was to find her last resting-place among generations of her forefathers, in the wild solitude of a burying-ground on an island of the mighty loch. In the parlour at Ragan prayer was offered up beside the dead, and a Gaelic psalm was sung. Not a woman was to be seen. But as they bore forth the body, a sudden melancholy "keening" testified that sundry ancient women, gathered about Mrs. McOrist in her retirement, kept up the mourning customs of their race.

They laid her coffin in the boat—the very boat with which she and her cousin had succoured George and Allan on the memorable night when they first saw Ragan. Her husband, her father, and her cousin Colin rowed it, and a place was found in it for Edgar Vivian—a Highland honour rendered to the stranger. Other mourners followed in other boats, and now from one, and now from another, the bagpipes sent up heart-piercing dirges. Edgar never forgot the scene. The day was glorious, as for a bridal. The lightest ripple stirred the face of the waters, and the shadows raced over the lower hills; massive Ben Schlioch lay back bathed in glory, and the quartz peaks of Ben Eay glistened in the sunlight; while the wild Gaelic music rose like the wail of aching human hearts in the midst of bright, placid nature. The soft shadows of the ancient trees on the little island seemed to offer a sympathising refuge from the garish sunshine on the loch. The dead silence at the grave painfully struck Edgar, accustomed to the sweet solace of the English burial

service. With uncovered heads, the friends and clansmen pressed round to take a last look into the open grave, and then the sods were turned in, and glengaries and hats were resumed.

Old Hector M'Orist laid his iron grasp on Edgar Vivian's yielding arm. The young Southern face, seen first in Ragan's darkest days, had won the stern old man by its profound sympathy with his own unspeakable woe. He led Edgar a little aside, and pointed down a bosky glade, where the sunbeams, only allowed to peep between tangled branches, glimmered on tall ferns and rich beds of mosses. He pointed to a dark green shadow, which looked little more than a deep hollow in the turf. But Edgar noticed that the aged tree beside it was hung with shreds of ribbon and scraps of cloth, and stuck full of coins.

"There," said Hector McOrist, "there is the well where the sick minds of our people were once restored to them again, sweet and sound. But it is dry now. It has dried up beneath the blaspheming mockery of the baser sort of stranger. It had no water for Morna. The ancient fountains of healing for our people are broken, and no new ones flow."

That was the father's one outbreak of feeling. He relaxed his hold on Edgar, turned abruptly away, and went among his neighbours, as austere and cold as if the heart within him were not broken.

And then the mourning procession returned to Ragan. Allan went at once to his hotel. Edgar spent the remainder of the day with the McOrists. The bereaved mother more than once expressed her satisfaction that Rosa had come back to them. She was much impressed by the discovery that it was Rosa's dead husband who had so strangely heard the unaccountable sound, which the elder McOrists now firmly believed had been the presage of Morna's approaching doom.

"But why did he hear it? And how did the end begin that day?" pondered the mourning mother. She remembered that the young Englishman had seemed to feel a foreboding lest the sign should have a sinister significance for him or his—and truly he had not been wrong! Had the token been sent to him—to him, a stranger—because his doom was to fall so close before that of the last daughter of the house?—and because her whom his heart had chosen was to come and sit—not in Morna's empty place, no, no!—but near it. But Janet McOrist found no answer to her second question, "How did the end begin that day?" She had never received a distinct impression of Allan Grale's arrival on that fateful night. Doubts and fears, lest some sudden attraction might spring up between Morna and George Vivian, the pleasant stranger, so singularly distinguished by the "Spirit" of the race, had led to the hasty breaking up of the circle round the hearth, and had prevented the old people from witnessing the tardy arrival of Allan. Had they seen him then, would they have known him again when he reappeared as

Mr. Smith? And if so, would they have been warned? It almost seemed as if the fears the "warning" had awakened, had themselves fulfilled the warning. Edgar said farewell to the family that night. Rose came out with him to the lonely road, and walked by his side a little way under the cold light of the stars.

"Don't be unhappy about me," she said. "Don't let a thought of me ever over-shadow you. I shall have peaceful days—peaceful days and useful work—and perhaps these good people will let me comfort them a little for Morna's loss. It will be such a life as I might have lived at home—only it is colder here—and the beauty is so grand and far, instead of near and winning! Good bye, Mr. Edgar Vivian."

They shook hands, and parted where the Ragan cart-way entered the high road. Rosa went back in the darkness, weeping bitterly—Edgar hastened forward through the haunted silence.

Meanwhile, though Edgar Vivian knew it not, he was being cleared of all suspicion in the eyes of Dering. Old Mittens' new housekeeper had found the missing letter among the "scraps;" it was in two or three pieces, but when joined together they presented the letter which Allan Grale had written, requesting Edgar to send the box to Corrabuin. When Edgar Vivian had met the cart that morning as he was going to the station with Rose, old Mittens was bearing the letter into Dering in triumph, to hand it over to those whom it might concern. Also there had come forward a gentleman, one Mr. Chard, who on the night of the fatal encounter had been passing near the Black Pool and saw two people quarrelling on its banks. The one was Allan Grale; the other was a stranger whom he had never before seen, certainly not Edgar Vivian, (whom he, Mr. Chard, knew well), or bearing the slightest resemblance to him. Mr. Chard being acquainted with Allan, hastened his steps onward, not liking to intrude on other people's private business, and never supposing that the quarrel would go on to blows. Mr. Chard was on his way to the station to catch the midnight train, en route to Southampton, whence he took steamer the next day for the West Indies. He had only now returned to England and to Dering, and become acquainted, for the first time, with what had taken place—upon which he hastened to declare his testimony. Which had the effect of putting the finishing touch upon the complete exoneration of Edgar.

CHAPTER XLV.

"A LIFE FOR A LIFE."

Allan Grale duly started with Edgar Vivian on his dismal journey to the South. They left the Glen in the early morning, the two alone travelling to the railway station in a chaise, which Edgar drove. They would have to go over precisely the same route which Allan had taken

with George Vivian the preceding year. What sad changes had taken place since that time! Then George Vivian had been full of health and hope, full of high promise and fair prospects; and Allan, though he had his secret anxieties and troubles, never feared but that he should surmount them.

"Oh!" moaned Allan to his own heart, as he sat with his head back against the well-padded carriage, and his hands before his face, "if I could but bring Abel Gibson back to life, and to the possibilities of amendment!" But that was not to be.

"Edgar," he said suddenly, as they were reseating themselves in the train after a half-hour's sojourn in the beautiful northern city which he had once said was chiefly famous to cockney travellers as "a halting-place for a mail and a meal," "with your leave, we will determine to go where George and I went by accident the last time we travelled this way. We will go to Savoch school-house, where live Abel Gibson's father and his mother, my own mother's only sister."

Edgar paused in doubt before he answered. "It will be too terrible an ordeal for you, Allan."

"I must give myself up to the old man, first of all," said Allan, in despairing tones. "I must tell him the whole truth freely, face to face, we two together. If he does not give me up to the grasp of the Law, I shall give myself up to it at Dering."

"There will be two words to that," thought Edgar. "Abel's mother will be there," he said aloud. "Remember that."

A spasm passed over Allan's face. "I do not forget it," he said. "God help her! Perhaps she need not hear my confession—but there! I am still thinking of myself rather than of her. But I must go and I will!"

When Savoch was reached, they did not find it, as on Allan's previous visit, bathed in a sweet sunshine, which made the most of its sparse attractions. This day was gray and gloomy, with a bitter sandy edge on the wintry air. As they turned a corner and came in sight of the schoolmaster's little house, standing bald and square opposite the bold square school-house, Allan uttered a low, pained cry.

There at the gateway, set in the low stone wall that surrounded the master's house, stood the same gaunt figure which had greeted the eyes of George Vivian, and which had struck him as giving singularly appropriate human interest to the dreary place. Perhaps the round shoulders were a little rounder—perhaps the uncovered grey hair was a little greyer. But that was all. The attitude was the same. The watching face turned in the same direction—towards them as they came along.

"It is my uncle!" groaned Allan. "He waits so every day. He is watching for Abel! He thinks that some day he will come home—and that the afternoon train is the one most likely to bring him." But as he spoke, it occurred to Edgar, as it did not seem to occur to Allan, that surely the Gibsons must have heard of the Dering mystery;

and that their nephew's visit would come upon them as a visit from the dead. Edgar scarcely knew how they introduced themselves; how they got through the greetings. But Mr. Gibson did not seem startled at their appearance. He gave them no warmer welcome than before, but he recognised Allan more quickly this time, and he mistook Edgar for George, not because there was much likeness between the living brother and the dead, but because it was not easy for Mr. Gibson to imagine changes, and it seemed most natural to infer that Allan would have the same companion. Again he led the way into the little parlour, grown just a shade shabbier and drearier. Again he summoned "Marget" from some upper chamber, and again "Marget" came, breathless and tremulous. Edgar found it hard to believe that the little, faded, worn-out woman could be "own sister" to that portly matron, Mrs. Grale.

Then followed a little desultory conversation, from which Edgar gathered that there had been very little communication between Savoch and Moorland House of late. Years ago, the intimacy between the two sisters' households had been partly suspended by the Gibsons' shame and sorrow concerning their son Abel. Mrs. Grale had been equally reluctant to write when sorrow fell upon her through Allan. She had said but little about his disappearance, putting it as "absence," and she had not yet brought herself to write of the dreadful discovery connected with the Dark Pool.

"Uncle," spoke Allan, in a pause of the conversation, "I should like to speak a few words with you alone."

A grey pallor swept over the minister's iron features, and he drew a hard breath. His wife's worn face, on the contrary, brightened with a strange, eager brightness. Something was coming! And something—anything—was better than the terrible suspense and unnatural silence of years.

"Marget," said the schoolmaster, "perhaps you will take the other young gentleman out and show him the church, and the little we have to show. Bid the lassie put tea in readiness for your return, and do not tarry long."

When they had gone out, closing the door behind them, Mr. Gibson turned to Allan and spoke with livid lips:

"Abel is dead."

Allan bowed his head. He could not remember afterwards with how many words, or how few, he told the whole dreadful story. He could never understand how far Mr. Gibson realised the whole facts of the case—that Allan himself had been accounted dead, and that his own son's body had been identified and buried as his. But one thing he managed to make quite plain, and that sufficed—that Abel Gibson was dead, and that he, the old man's only son, had met his death at the hand of himself, Allan Grale. He tried to hint, gently and considerately, in a short sentence, what his life from Abel and his provocation had been.

The old man buried his face in his hands. But he did not weep. He only felt that he would never have to stand and watch at the gate again: he only knew, for the first time, how much hope there had been in his daily waitings there!

"I have come to give myself up to you," said Allan, "that you may give me in charge to answer for this."

The stricken father stood up, that grey pallor still overspreading his features.

"I cannot do it!" he said. "Poor wretch! I will not do it!"

"Oh, uncle, you have a right to do so. Does not the highest law say, 'A life for a life?' Why do you not curse me?"

A strange light illumined the minister's naturally stern face. It was like the first sunbeam of spring struggling through the dim clouds of a long winter.

"My curse shall be forgiveness," he cried, unconsciously quoting the words of an unhappy poet. "My only sentence on you, Allan, is, go in peace. My son Abel led you into sin—alas, I know what Abel was!—and your sin rebounded upon himself; and now I, Abel's father, for the very sake of my fatherhood, will rise up between his sins and any further fruit of misery." He paused a moment, to overcome his emotion. Allan stood in silence before him, with bowed head.

"Let his death ransom thy soul from evil—thy soul that was nearly ruined by his life!" continued the old man. "Thy crime against him was done under sore temptation, unwittingly, in mad haste. Let his father's forgiveness be thy city of refuge from the Avenger of blood. The law of Moses is not destroyed by the gospel of mercy—it is but fulfilled. A life for a life need not mean a death for a death! Thy life is forfeit—truly; let it be forfeit to God. Dedicate it to Him from henceforth, and let thy devotion to His service atone for the past."

Lower and lower bent the head of Allan Grale. This forgiveness of the good and upright minister sounded to him like a very forgiveness from Heaven. Suddenly there seemed to be more in the room than they two. In moments of supreme emotion the veil between the seen and the unseen grows slight. Where was Morna? Where was Abel? A vision of the two floated before Allan's eyes, and he remembered, as in a dream, that in the parable, Abraham, the friend of God, had been within speech of Dives, who was not even the friend of man.

Mr. Gibson took the great family Bible. He opened it at the fly-leaf, that leaf whereon George Vivian had remarked the strange excision.

"Perhaps I was too stern when I cut my son's name from our household record," he said. And slowly, with shaking hands, he re-wrote the name of Abel Gibson, once removed in shame and agony. He added the date of his birth. And then he went on: "And

Abel Gibson departed this life on ——" He paused, and turned to Allan, who supplied the date in a whisper.

"The 20th of October."

He, the father, could bear up no more. Folding his arms over the sacred Book, he lifted up his voice and wept.

But he soon calmed himself with habitual self-command: for he had further counsels to give to Allan and charges to lay upon him.

Edgar Vivian felt he had never had a much more trying task than to bear Mrs. Gibson company in that walk. Would she ask him any question? and if so, how should he parry it? What could he say? But he did not know Mrs. Gibson, nor the power of endurance to which she had attained through long years of the harshest self-discipline. Ease and luxury might have endowed Mrs. Grale with a bountiful presence, but her sister had the balance of spiritual strength and power. Where Mrs. Grale's woes would have gushed forth, regardless of aught but their own relief, worn and wasted Mrs. Gibson would have "thought shame" to trouble any stranger with her cares and sorrows. She told Edgar all about Savoch's one antiquity. She walked with him round the church. As she neared the Gibsons' grave, she thought how kindly his brother had spoken to her last year, and in the prim style of her old-fashioned courtesy, she asked after him. Dead! Was he really dead? Could it be true? And then she, for the first time, understood the reason of the deep mourning Edgar wore. She halted by her daughter's grave: tears rushed to her eyes, and she did not check their flow. It was long since she had wept for dead Lizzie. It was long since she had wept for lost Abel. She only wept for them when she wept for other people's losses and crosses, and for those her tears were ready.

"Dead!" she said, "and he so young and so cheerful! And he would be such a loss to so many! Well, well—there's one thing certain—that God doesn't see Death as we see it. I've begun to wonder whether spiritual things are not as much wider and more beautiful and more wonderful than our thoughts of them."

At that moment they heard a call :— "Marget, Marget!"

It was the schoolmaster's voice; but it was soft and tremulous. The wife started to obey its summons, but turning she saw her husband coming stumbling through the long grass towards her, and, by some sudden instinct, she stood still, waiting for him by their daughter's grave. Edgar turned away. There must be no witness to their meeting, no listener to their words! But on the still summer air the schoolmaster's voice was floated towards his ear :

"Abel is dead."

From the mother there came no cry, no wail, no sob. As he wandered among the graves Edgar could hear quiet murmurs of question and reply. He wondered where Allan was; he doubted what he ought to do next. But presently Mrs. Gibson relieved him from his perplexity, by stealing softly to his side.

"I suppose you knew before," she said in a broken voice.

"Yes, I knew," Edgar answered, looking with infinite pity on her worn face, now transfigured by tender emotion.

"Well, well," she sighed, "God loved Abel before I did; and so—— And I couldn't take care of him," she continued after a pause; "and now it is over—at least, so we say! But I'm not sure that it is over, even for me. And I don't believe anything ever is over for God!"

Edgar did not answer.

"Didn't I say how one gets many thoughts, living so much alone? And I believe Mr. Gibson has had them also. And so poor Mary's son had gone wrong, too! I have been afraid of that. I had my fears about him last year; I had watched the drifting down in Abel, and I knew the signs. And it seems that my poor boy's sudden end has pulled up Mary's boy. Allan would not wait to see me; Mr. Gibson says he thought he had better not, so he's off to the station already, and you are to go after him. You must not think us inhospitable ——"

"No, no, no!" interrupted Edgar, fervently.

"You will give my love to Allan. Tell him I'm sorry he did not wait to see me: and he is never to leave off trying to be good, and, if he ever fails, he is always to begin again, and it will grow easier every time. And Mr. Gibson sent good-bye to you, and says maybe you'll excuse him from coming to speak to you himself."

Edgar grasped the little woman's hand warmly, and hurried off, almost without a word, after Allan. At the bend of the road he looked back. The old couple were standing side by side, arm-in-arm, at their little gate. Mr. Gibson waved his hand in dumb token of farewell.

"We are ready to go ourselves now," said Marget Gibson to her husband, as Edgar passed onwards out of their sight. "I have feared we should not be able to die, while our boy might come to want us on the earth." But the mother's longings rose strong within her as she turned to enter the house, and she cried out with a bitter cry:—

"Oh, Abel, my son; my son Abel! Oh, Abel, my son, my son!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE travellers went on South, halting at Sladford. It was only then Moorland House heard that the one mourned as dead was yet in life.

Alas! there could be no bitter-sweet return of the prodigal son! Allan was separated for ever from the old days and the old ways and the old home. He would soon have to realise that saddest of all truths, that the empty places are generally soon filled, and that if the dead could return they might often find themselves little welcome.

To Mr. Grale, his son's unlooked-for return only brought back

much of the old shame and mortification which he had in a degree lived down. It also proved Dr. Palmer right and himself wrong in many details—not least, in the character of Edgar Vivian. That Allan should return, and not be able to right himself in the eyes of the world, was very galling to the honest old manufacturer, who had always held his own head upright.

Lord Rockford had taken the advice of his kinswoman, Lady Laura—to make hay while the sun shone. He had proposed to Miss Grale, and had been accepted. Mary Anne hastened to impart to him the strange and startling news that the brother who had been mourned as dead—and murdered—was still living. It had been a mistake all the time. Allan, for some purposes of his own, probably a whim, had been staying with friends in some remote wild of Scotland, unconscious of the commotion being made over him at home. She believed he had been "awfully extravagant," she added, and thought he must have buried himself there to retrench.

Mary Anne Grale, with all her own worldliness, had not risen to the cynical height of remembering that her brother's return might make a great difference in her marriage settlements. She saw how very grave the Viscount looked, but she did not put the gravity down to its true source. She thought he was sorry for Allan. In reality, he was inwardly speculating whether the young lady would still be endowed with the magnificence which could alone justify his converting her into the Viscountess Rockford. But Lady Laura Bond's skilfully-expressed sympathy with Mr. Grale soon enabled her to set Lord Rockford's mind at ease. In fact, Mr. Grale spoke purposely that she should do so.

Mr. Grale was not himself particularly in love with the Viscount; he had, as he expressed it, "taken that young gentleman's measure." But he believed the young fellow's faults to be tolerably harmless; the thought of a coronet and a title in his family tickled him, and he was quite prepared to pay for the baubles, just as he had paid for Mrs. Grale's memorable diamond cross years before.

"Poor Alny intends to leave the country," Mr. Grale said to Lady Laura, with whom he was on easy, confidential terms, though not to the extent of revealing to her his son's true history. "He talks of Australia—but I don't yet know whether he will fix on that remote part of the world."

"Dear me!" she exclaimed. "My dear, good friend, what has he done that he should make an exile of himself?"

"He has passed through great sorrow," said the old man, bluntly. "He married a sweet young Scotch girl up in the North, and she died. Died not a week ago, hardly; and Allan says he cannot stay in the old country, shall never be happy again in it, and means to settle for life away from it. *Of course*, he will receive a suitable competency from me," added the speaker with stern emphasis; "but the greater portion of my wealth, Lady Laura, will descend to my daughter."

"No doubt you are right, my dear sir. Poor Alny!"

"Alny says to me that he does not want a penny," continued Mr. Grale, with a sob in his throat. "He tried my pocket pretty freely before he left home, and he does not forget that. He wishes to work his way out, and work his way onwards when he gets there, as many a better man has done before him; having to work will keep him, he thinks, from dwelling upon the past. Any way, poor fellow, he has managed to make a hash of his life."

But there were hearts in Dering which opened to poor Allan in his sore humiliation. The truth was not declared, and nobody guessed that it was Allan who had sent the other man into the Black Pool; nobody knew, or guessed, who it was that had been found in it. That mystery would remain a mystery to the last.

But Allan was not at Dering. When he had been persuaded, by the wise and impressive counsel of his Uncle Gibson, not to give himself up to the police, he had decided to stay at Sladford. So a small, lonely lodging was taken for him, while Edgar went on to Moorland House to declare the truth there.

Two hearts especially opened to Allan—his mother's and Maria Vivian's; and they knew the truth. Very differently did they open, because their quality was different. The one heart was something like a household closet, where are stored things, good, bad, and indifferent: much that is useful, not a great deal that is valuable. The other heart was like a little shrine, with the sunlight coming through a pictured saint upon the window pane and falling coloured on the white lilies of the altar.

"My dear boy," cried the mother, rushing into his arms in the dreary sitting-room at Sladford: "My dear boy, didn't I always tell you what your sudden passions would bring you to?—didn't I always?—although they were so soon over, and you never meaning any harm? And to think it should happen at last with my poor sister Margaret's boy! But he was a bad one always, and no mistake; and it used to make me quite angry to think how she troubled herself about him. And it's a happy release he was taken at last: he would have come to worse had he lived. One can easily see how it happened. You were struggling together on the edge of that dreadful Pool, and——"

"Don't go on, mother!"

"And you gave him a sharper knock than ordinary," sobbed Mrs. Grale, totally regardless of her son's injunction, "and he happened to fall in—that was all. That was all, Allan. It might have been either of you. Hush! Don't say a word. Don't excite me. I'm flurried enough already, what with this, and Mary Anne's marriage, and everything all happening at once. Your father says you have made up your mind not to come up to Moorland House, and he seems to think it best——"

"It is best, mother," said Allan, again interposing. "It is best that I should go away from here—straight away."

"Well, well, you two will have your own way, whatever I say," went on Mrs. Grale. "But, at any rate, you are to come up to Dering Church on Sunday morning, and sit in our pew, next to me."

"Sit in Dering church on Sunday morning!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, you are. I've talked to your father. Seeing is a deal better than hearing for believing, and then there'll be no longer room for doubt. When they see you, they'll *know* that you are in life: and they'll know that it was not you, Alny, who was found in patches and shoddy. I could hardly lift up my head with the disgrace of it, my dear, when the people said it was you. Why, the things ought to have told 'em it wasn't you, and might have told me, too; only you see, my dear, you would sometimes go off for a day or two without as much as a hand-bag, and buy rubbishing shirts and collars at some cheap flaring shop. I have given away all your things, Alny, believing you were dead," she added, the tears running down her cheeks; "but you shall have all new ones. I can take care of your outfit, at any rate."

"I shall need very little, mother," he observed, gently.

"You shall have everything you should have," she persisted. "And Alny, I am going to write out to Australia, to my old friend, Bell Matthewson. She lives there, as you've heard, and she'll be near at hand to keep a kindly eye upon you, and she'll make her house a sort of home for you whenever you choose to enter it. I know Bell Matthewson. I just looked at her portrait the minute before I came out to-day, and thought how strange it was that we two should have met just at the time you had gone away. I told Mary Anne, soon after, that Bell Matthewson always had been in at all my troubles. May be, what we call Fate is always Providence; only we rarely see it, and don't know how to use it."

"Well, then, mother," said Allan, tenderly, "I shall see you at least once more—on Sunday in church."

"See me at least once more!" she echoed, almost angrily. "Of course you will! But you will be back again in a few years, when things have blown over. Perhaps sooner, for things right themselves very soon now-a-days. Now don't contradict me, I'm too nervous. I maintain that you *will* come back. Dr. Palmer says I must not be excited. You'd not wish to make me ill, child!"

"No, no," he murmured.

"And look here," added Mrs. Grale. "It has come into my mind while I've been talking with you, that you might come to us on Saturday night instead of Sunday morning. I'll make it right with your father, though I think he'll see it as I do. Obstinacy may be very good, but common sense is better. You'd like to come when the dark shades of evening lie over the village, rather than in the broad glare of daylight, if your object, as you say, is not to encounter people. Yes: come on Saturday evening and stay with us in private till Sunday evening. Oh, child!"—breaking down with a burst

of grief—"you'll not begrudge that bit of time to your poor unhappy mother!"

"I will come," faltered Allan. "It is best as you say—dear, dear mother."

On the Sunday morning, to the surprise of an excited congregation, Allan Grale sat in the pew between his father and mother. Mary Anne was with them. The golden sun shone down upon the young man's head, and on the deep mourning which he wore. He looked greatly changed. Everybody thought him that. His hair was bright as ever, but his face was worn and thin and sad. He never lifted his eyes from his book, and he would keep his hand pressed on his brow for minutes together, as if he had a pain there. Service over, the people, rich and poor, gathered in the churchyard to greet and welcome him as he came out; but he passed quietly through a door in the vestry and escaped them.

That evening, in the Sabbath stillness of the gloaming, Allan's last interview with Maria Vivian took place. Allan had been to the Court; the old General asked it as a favour; and after warm farewells were said there, Maria walked with him to the great trees at the bend of the avenue, and there they halted, under the leafy shade. They knew that they were parting for ever—but only for the for ever on earth.

What took place at that interview, what they said to one another, lay between themselves. It was a secret, to be cherished and held sacred in their own hearts. That the hour was fraught with sorrow the deepest and bitterest, who could doubt?

"We are nearer, Allan, to one another than we ever were before, now that we each hold the same goal in view," Maria whispered to him, when the parting moment came. "God keep you, my dear one! God bless and guide you!"

His tears fell like rain on her cold cheek, as he kissed her and sobbed forth his last words. The wind was rising; the autumn evening was growing dusk and dreary. Maria stood with clasped, uplifted hands and streaming eyes, as she watched him away. The little pearl cross lay on her dress; it was he who had given it to her in the happy days gone by; he had pressed his cheek to it for a moment now, and asked her to let it put her in remembrance of him when she wore it. As Maria turned back to the house with her weight of pain, she said to herself that she should always wear the cross; always, and no other ornament.

Allan said farewell to his mother and Mary Anne that night, and returned to Sladford. The following day he departed for Liverpool, his father and Edgar Vivian accompanying him; and on the Tuesday morning he sailed away in the good ship that was to carry him to the other side of the world.

Little remains to be told of Dering. Two marriages took place

shortly, though not quite at the same time—that of Edgar Vivian with Agnes Palmer, and of Lord Rockford with Mary Anne Grale. The one wedding ceremony was as unpretendingly quiet and sunnily joyful, as the other was grand and crowded and unsatisfactory. Agnes was able to keep her promise of not wandering far from her father, for the young couple took up their abode at Dering Court, which Edgar would inherit at his uncle's death. Agnes did not have to encounter the constant supervision and criticism of Mrs. Vivian; for the General, who could never rally to his full strength, was ordered by the medical men to take up his abode in Bath.

The gaiety of the place suited Mrs. Vivian, the General himself liked it, and henceforth they only appeared at Dering Court during the bright, warm weeks of summer. Dr. Palmer would seize upon that occasion to make his daughter and son-in-law spend a little of the time with him. Lettice and her husband would come to meet them; and Lettice would saucily observe that Agnes had escaped what was good for her, for to reside with Mrs. Vivian would have been a wholesome cross! Maria divided her time between the two places—Bath and Dering Court.

And when, as the next few years rolled on, after the General had been made intensely happy by seeing a George and an Edgar of another generation, there came a little maiden, it was Maria who was asked to give her, if not her own name, at least a name of her own choosing.

"Will you let her be called Morna?" she asked.

"And the next shall be Maria," whispered Agnes to her husband.

"And what about you and Lettice?" he asked, playfully.

Agnes laughed. "Ours will do for second names," she answered. "The little ones call us 'mamma' and 'aunt' already, but you and Charlie are not to be allowed to degenerate into that. You are always to call us Agnes and Lettice—and there is to be no doubt who you mean, sir."

It was during the passing of these years that the two old sisters, bereaved of their beloved ones, met once more.

Some scholastic business called Mr. Gibson to the Scottish capital for a day; his wife accompanied him; and Mrs. Grale, hearing of the proposed visit, travelled thither for a passing interview.

It was a painful meeting. But as the sisters sat, hands clasped in hands and tears answering to tears, the one could utter no reproach against the other. If Allan had given the blow which dealt Abel his death, Abel's own wicked conduct had provoked it. Rather they spoke soothingly and affectionately of that hope which remains to us all—the reunion in the future life, when this troubled life shall be over.

"There will be no partings there, Polly," sighed Mrs. Gibson, "no weary care or misunderstandings, no hearts breaking in silence and fear—and both my dear ones are already there, gone on to it."

"Ay," said Mrs. Grale, hushing her sobs. "We've both had

our trials here in one shape or another, Marget, you and me, and we're each living in our old age in a lonely home, no children around to cheer us. But the Lord will give them back to us in Heaven."

"I'm just living on for it, Mary. So is Mr. Gibson also, I know, only he does not speak of it."

"What odd things those dreams were that came to you and to me!" exclaimed Mrs. Grale. "We both had them in the self-same night, you know, Marget, and it was the dreadful night when it all happened; and the Black Pool was in the dreams as plain as plain, and Abel and Allan were there, and you and me! We little thought then what the dreams might have warned us of!"

"Ay, Mary, dreams are strange matters," said Mrs. Gibson, "and they come from the Unseen. We cannot tell how or why here, but we shall know hereafter."

THE END.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

YES, it is over and ended—
The dream of delight and the vision,
Over, all of it over,
Mask of lover and lover;
Lovers' ways that we wended
In a world that was always Elysian,
Lovers' vows that were spoken,
Lovers' lives that were blended,
Only to cheat and be broken,
Only to droop and be ended:
Gone!—not a hope to remind us
Of the darkened Eden behind us.

Tears of a tardy contrition,
Tears for a sign and a token
Of a true, true heart that is broken,
A false, false heart that pretended—
Vain now the dream is all ended:
Yet spare me the smile of derision,
The laugh that will wake on the morrow,
For my vision that was but a vision,
My sorrow that is but a sorrow.
Go!—there is nothing to bind us,
And wherever the future may find us,
Eden lies buried behind us.—GEORGE COTTERELL.

PETTIFER'S CLERK.

IT is said that every woman has her favourite preacher, her favourite doctor, and her favourite disease. That some women have, experience shows us.

Mrs. Clive's favourite preacher was an eloquent man, who thumped the cushions well in his lavender-kid gloves, assured his male listeners that they would go to perdition unless they mended their manners and were more indulgent to their wives, and compared the wives to angel-martyrs. Her favourite medical attendant was one Dr. Zoar; and her favourite disease was nerves. Mrs. Clive was a widow and rich, able to indulge in all her whims and fancies; and she was yet young. She lived at that fashionable inland watering-place Spafield, which was gay and crowded all the year round.

In the wide and open street, leading direct from the Parade, stood the handsome shop of William Pettifer, chemist and druggist. William Pettifer had grown elderly in its service, wealthy also; he liked to take his ease now, and turned the shop over chiefly to his manager and shopmen. He was the brother of the first physician in the town, Dr. Charles Pettifer, and was held to be a man of consideration. His only son, John, who had been to Oxford, and was otherwise liberally educated, was studying for the medical profession. Just now the manager was ill, Mr. Pettifer was also ill; and John, at his father's request, might be seen often in the shop, serving sometimes.

One morning, when John Pettifer was standing behind the counter on the left-hand side as you entered, three assistants in white aprons being behind the counter on the right-hand side, there stood beside him a tall, earnest-looking, handsome man, whose years might be about the same as John's, midway between twenty and thirty. They were deep in conversation, their heads bent together, and the young men opposite were serving customers, when an open barouche dashed up to the door. It contained Mrs. Clive and her daughter, the latter a charming girl of eighteen, just home from school. Mrs. Clive's carriage might be seen before the shop most days; not to get the prescriptions of Dr. Zoar made up, for he furnished his own medicines —it was safer, he told his patients; but to purchase some specific or other, good for the nerves.

The footman leaped down from his place and awaited the orders of his mistress. She merely motioned for the door to be opened.

"My dear, I shall send you in," she said to her daughter; "and then I know there'll be no mistake. Ask for a bottle of Green-sage Nervine. Be particular: *Green-sage Nervine.* I know it must be most excellent, for Dr. Zoar recommended it."

Miss Eleanor Clive stepped lightly on the pavement to enter the

shop. She was a pretty, graceful, innocent girl, healthy and sunny-natured; her cheeks had a delicate brightness, resembling the blossom of a peach. She went in with the light, elastic tread, which, alas, one only has in the golden time of youth. She wore a summer muslin dress and a pale blue gossamer bonnet, which set off the fair face and golden hair, went straight up to the counter on the left, and held out her hand to John Pettifer.

"How are you, Miss Lella?" he said, shaking the hand heartily—for he and she had been always well-acquainted. Dr. Pettifer and the late Mr. Clive were intimate friends, and John and Eleanor often met at the Doctor's house or at her own.

"Oh, quite well, thank you," she said, her face all smiling dimples; "and so happy to be at home again. Mamma has told me to ask for—what was it?—bending her face to consider.

"The 'Unfailing Life Elixir—' was that it?" suggested the young man, laughing.

"No, no; I remember now. It was to be a bottle of Green-sage Nervine. Something sure to be very good, mamma says, as the new doctor, Dr. Zoar, recommended it."

Mr. John Pettifer turned to the well-furnished shelves behind him, and saw that what he sought was just beyond the friend he had been talking with. "Would you give me one of those small bottles—there, in the second compartment," he said to him, to avoid pushing by.

The stranger had been gazing at the pretty vision which was brightening the shop with its presence; he said to himself that he had never seen so sweet a face, and fell in love with it there and then. She was looking at him. She saw a pale, serious-looking man with (she thought) the nicest face she ever saw. A faint, bright flush came into her cheeks as she caught his earnest eyes fixed on her. It was a case of mutual attraction.

John Pettifer put the small bottle of Green-sage Nervine into paper, went round the counter, and escorted Miss Clive to the door. Then he handed it to her.

"Is that a new—clerk—of yours?" she asked him as she took it. The word "shopman" had been on her tongue, but the stranger looked too much of a gentleman for an ordinary shopman, and she substituted the other.

"Oh, to be sure," answered John Pettifer, laughing a little; "my father's new book-keeper."

"What a charming girl!" exclaimed the new clerk, as John Pettifer went back behind the counter when the barouche had driven off. "Who is she?"

"Her name is Eleanor Clive; she is an only child and an heiress—a little sweetheart of mine in the days gone by."

"Do you mean that? Are you going to—to make up to her?"

"*I!*" laughed John—"as if they'd look at me! Had I been my uncle's son instead of my father's, it might have been different. No,

no ; there's nothing of that kind between little Lella and me. Mrs. Clive would ——Why here she is, back again."

The carriage had once more stopped oposite the door. Mrs. Clive was bending forward, and John Pettifer went out.

"I am so very sorry I forgot to tell Eleanor to enquire after your father, Mr. John," said Mrs. Clive, who was extremely affable and devoid of pride. "We heard a sad account of him yesterday from Dr. Pettifer, whom we met on the Parade."

"Oh, thank you, he is much better to-day," was John's reply. "I will tell him you enquired after him."

"Do so, and——dear me!"

A dark man came along the pavement, with a brisk, jaunty step. He looked to be about forty years of age, but was probably older: his face had a sort of perpetual, alluring smile upon it, and a great deal of glossy black hair. The ladies of Spafield called him handsome; Mrs. Clive thought him very much so. He was fashionably dressed, and in his white shirt-front shone diamonds of the first water. We accord more latitude to a foreigner in the matter of attire than we allow ourselves, and that the wearer of the diamond studs was not an Englishman, his yellow skin and peculiar eyes betrayed.

"Ah, Dr. Zoar, how do you do?" exclaimed Mrs. Clive from her carriage, as she bent forward and held out her hand to the dark man.

"My dear lady," he exclaimed, grasping it, "how are *you?* That is the great question."

"Oh, I had a wretched night, woke up nearly every hour, and was all of a shake this morning; but I am now going to try the new remedy, the Green-sage Nervine.—My daughter," added Mrs. Clive, perceiving the great Doctor's eyes were fixed with curiosity upon the young lady. "Eleanor, this is my very good friend, Dr. Zoar."

Eleanor bowed, but she did not put out her hand, as might have been expected of her to any one introduced in this way, for she was of an open, guileless nature, and not much more than a child in her ways yet. Dr. Zoar, however, extended his hand, and she had to meet it.

Meanwhile the stranger in Pettifer's shop had stood watching what took place outside. His eyes seemed fascinated by the sight of Dr. Zoar; the latter detected them fixed upon him, stared for a moment questioningly in return, and then made an enquiry in an undertone of John Pettifer.

"Who is that man behind the counter there?—a new shopman?"

"Oh, he's my clerk," carelessly responded John Pettifer. "Just engaged him."

"If you are not too busy, will you drive home with us to luncheon, Dr. Zoar?" cried Mrs. Clive. "And then, perhaps, you will prescribe for me."

"With pleasure, my dear madam," replied the doctor.

Once more somebody else came along the pavement: a woman this time. She was thin almost as a skeleton, had a pale, sallow

face and malignant light grey eyes. John Pettifer's new clerk fancied he saw a faint quick sign pass between Dr. Zoar and this woman with the evil eyes. But she passed swiftly on her way; while the Doctor took his seat in the carriage opposite Mrs. Clive and her daughter, and was whirled away.

These six people who met at the door of the drug-mart—Mrs. and Miss Clive, Dr. Zoar, the thin woman with the pitiless eyes, John Pettifer and his new clerk—these are the chief actors in the drama. The accident which brought them all together at that same hour—no, the fate, for there is no "accident" in this life—was a somewhat singular one. But events will unfold themselves as we go on.

"So that is your great physician, is it, John?" observed Pettifer's clerk, as Dr. Zoar and the carriage disappeared. "I had forgotten the name when you spoke just now, but I have not forgotten *him*."

"Did you know him, then?"

"I did once. He was attached to our regiment as native medical assistant when we were quartered in the West Indies."

"I thought he looked curiously at you."

"He would not know me. I was only a youngster then, just joined; had not grown into the tall, fierce warrior I've become since," he added, laughing. "No, Dr. Zoar would not know me now. Look here, Pettifer—I'm your new clerk, you understand, for a bit, and nothing else; I heard you tell him so. Name, Mr. Francis, if anybody's curious on the score. No one knows me here."

"With all my heart," assented John. "But what's the point?"

"I should like to keep my eye upon that renowned physician for a short time. It may be my duty to do so in the interest of your community. How long do you say he has been practising at Spafield?"

"About ten months or a year. He came down upon the place with a splash and a dash, and took the women's hearts by storm, putting the noses of the old practitioners out of joint. He has become the fashion, and you can understand what that implies. Some of the women pin their faith to him as an infallible saint, neither quite human nor quite divine, but something of both."

"He *is* clever."

"What do you know of him?"

"I knew him to be a man who was evil to the back-bone; who only lived to prey upon his fellow-creatures," answered Pettifer's clerk. "He is a powerful mesmerist of the most unscrupulous type. For his own aggrandisement, or for greed of gold, Zoar would not hesitate to commit any crime denounced in the Decalogue."

II.

A WEEK went on. Dr. Zoar became more intimate, day by day, at Mrs. Clive's; and made himself agreeable, or strove to do so, to Lella as well as to her mother. But that young lady could not, as her discerning maid, Patsey, expressed it, "abide him." One day the

Doctor, his face elongated with serious concern, expressed a gentle doubt about Miss Eleanor's health.

"Her health!" cried Mrs. Clive in dismay. "Do you really fear she is ill, Doctor? Why that would be a climax—for Lella to be ill with nerves as well as me!"

"Ah, my dear lady, it is not 'nerves' that we need fear in your daughter's case," said Dr. Zoar, with compassion. "If what I suspect be amiss, she ——"

"Why, mamma, I am as well as I can be," spoke up Lella.

"Be quiet, child; Dr. Zoar must know best. What were you about to say, Doctor?"

"Only that she may require our utmost care for a little time. Allow me ——" And Dr. Zoar, a wicked gleam of satisfaction shooting like lightning out of his black eyes into Lella's, put one hand upon her brow and the other hand upon his own brow. The girl would have drawn back. "Allow me half a moment," he murmured as he closed his eyes.

"Hush! Lella," enjoined her mother, in a tone of mystery and awe. "He is communing with the spiritual power that lies within him. It is the way in which he ascertains beyond doubt the nature of his patients' hidden ailments."

"I'm sure I have no ailments, hidden or not hidden," thought Lella. But she was under the rule of strict obedience to her mother, and remained still.

Presently the Doctor dropped his hands, opened his eyes, and heaved a sigh. "There *is* mischief inwardly, my dear madam," he said, with deep compassion. "I thought my observation could not be mistaken; it never failed me yet. But it is very slight at present, and I shall be able to arrest it."

"What is it that's the matter with me?" asked Lella, doubting still, yet a little impressed.

"Sit here," said the Doctor, placing her in a large elbow chair with her head resting back on its cushions. "I must try a little clairvoyance."

"But I don't like clairvoyance; I have heard all sorts of strange things about it," said Lella, in alarm. "Mamma, I don't want clairvoyance to be tried on me."

Dr. Zoar regarded her with the pitying smile of a superior being; through which pitying smile, all the same, shone dimly the look of a hawk in the act of pouncing upon an innocent little chicken.

"My dear young lady," said the Doctor, "the late improvements in our physical science enable us to see the heart of the earth as plainly as you can see the dome of that church yonder in the noonday sun. Our new science reaches as high as the clouds, and is as deep as—as—the bottomless abyss. By it, we, to whom is granted the power of discernment, can read off mankind as a child's primer; and the thoughts of all men are an open book to us."

He looked at her keenly as he spoke; Lella, conscious that she wasn't thinking any good of the speaker himself at that particular moment, couldn't help blushing and looking a little confused, nothing of which escaped the watchful eye of the seer. But Mrs. Clive, soft and credulous, groaned approval, and folded her hands solemnly.

Dr. Zoar heard it. "Madam," he said, turning to her, "do you remember the day, about a fortnight ago, when I found it necessary to put you into a state of clairvoyance upon your doing me the honour to consult me after a particularly aggravated nervous attack?"

"Perfectly," answered Mrs. Clive. "I remember I had put on my new lilac silk that day, and that absurd Patsey said I was ill because the waist was too tight."

"Just so," replied the Doctor. "Well, madam, I will tell you now that on that occasion you indicated to me, when in your trance, that my services would shortly be required for another member of your family. I did not mention it then, lest it should alarm you."

"Most wonderful!" murmured Mrs. Clive. "Oh, my dear Doctor, what is science coming to?"

The Doctor did not say; perhaps he did not know. He placed a hand upon each of Lella's shoulders, to begin operations. Lella pushed his hands away.

"Are you obliged to touch me, sir?" she said, shrinkingly.

The feeling was not lost upon Dr. Zoar, and he frowned wickedly. But the frown passed at once into a tender smile. "We can do without it," he said.

Passing his hands before her and about her with the usual passes, Lella was soon in the mesmeric sleep. The Doctor put no questions to her. He made his observation of the sleeper in silence, and then imparted his opinion to the mother.

"The mischief has been going on for some time," he said. "It is the result of overstraining the mental powers. She has been doing too much at school. All girls do, now-a-days. The brain gets too heavily taxed, and then there's—pardon me, my dear lady—the deuce to pay."

"Oh, yes," gasped Mrs. Clive; "but what, my dear Doctor, has it done to her?"

"Well, I cannot yet quite say. But unless the mischief which has set in can be arrested, it might end in epilepsy."

Mrs. Clive gave a shriek. "Oh, Doctor! Doctor!"

"My dearest lady, pray be calm. I said, unless the mischief can be arrested. But I think I can arrest it: I am almost sure I can. But I must take her into my hands as my patient from to-morrow."

"Oh, pray, pray take her from to-day," implored Mrs. Clive. "What a dreadful thing! My only child! I have allowed her to stay at school too long."

"Yes, that is where it lies—she has stayed there too long."

"How foolish I have been!" groaned the poor lady.

"I shall do my best to set her right," said the Doctor, as he began to make the passes necessary to arouse Lella. "And, my dear madam, I must warn you not to impart to her exactly what it is that we fear; there's no need to frighten her."

But when did a bewildered mother ever take judicious advice and restrain her tongue? Lella, who was feeling a little dazed and stupid after her mesmeric trance, but not sufficiently so to deaden her curiosity, began to put questions the instant Dr. Zoar had left.

"Mamma, what did he say after he had put me to sleep?"

"Oh!" moaned Mrs. Clive, putting her hands to her face, but explaining nothing.

"I wonder you let him do it! Putting me to sleep indeed, as if I were a baby! What did he say, mamma?"

"Oh, my darling child, he said the root of it all was that you had been overworked at school!"

"I'm sure I was not," said Lella, indignantly: "our lessons were as easy as they could be."

"And he said," sobbed Mrs. Clive, who had broken into tears, "that if we—we did not take great care of you now you might have a fit of epilepsy."

"Mamma, I don't believe a word of it."

"And he is going to bring you some powders to-morrow which you are to take; and he thinks they will put you right again, and avert the evil. He feels sure of it, he says. But, my dear, I shall never forgive myself for having left you so long at that wretched school!"

Lella ran over to kiss and soothe her mother, and then tossed her rebellious little head. She did not mind taking a few harmless powders—nothing but chalk and flour mixed, perhaps!—but she felt persuaded Dr. Zoar, to whom she had taken an unaccountable dislike, was inventing this supposed tendency to illness only to put a few of her mother's guineas into his capacious pocket.

Naturally it stood to reason that the sleepless night of torment which Mrs. Clive passed, after going to bed, should bring on a real attack of nerves in the morning instead of a fancied one. A servant was despatched in haste for Dr. Zoar. But the man came back without the Doctor. That renowned leech had been summoned to a patient in the country, and would return to Spafield by the two o'clock train.

"Give me the red lavender," said Mrs. Clive to her maid. "Of course he will come to me the instant he gets back; but how I am to live through the hours till then, I'm sure I don't know."

Lella took the opportunity of walking out. Attended by Patsey (a corruption of the young lady's when a child, the maid's name being Patterley) she went forth to buy blue ribbon for her hair, and profited by her liberty to visit the pastrycook's and buy some chocolate creams. The shop chanced to be next door to Pettifer's, the chemist and druggist; and Lella was just in the act of eating a tempting raspberry

tart, when who should come in, to eat, he said, tarts and puffs on his own score, but Pettifer's clerk.

"Good morning, Miss Lella," said he, putting out his hand to shake hers. By which familiar address it might be perceived that they had improved their acquaintance since the first day of meeting in the shop. In fact they had met in the street, and Lella had again been several times sent by her mother into Pettifer's while she waited outside in the carriage. Pettifer's clerk had made use of these occasions; and Miss Lella was far from reproaching him for it.

"Do you know Dr. Zoar, Mr. Francis?" Lella suddenly asked him, as they sauntered together up a side walk; the young lady having left Patsey in the shop to pay, and to consume what she pleased herself before coming after them.

"Yes—a little," replied Pettifer's clerk. "Why?"

"Do you like him?" pursued she.

"Not much."

"I don't like him at all; I can't bear him," said Miss Lella. "He has been persuading mamma that I am ill, and is going to send me some powders to take."

Pettifer's clerk had a frank, good-looking countenance, but it wore a very black expression just now.

"What does he say is the matter with you?" asked he, hurriedly.

"He says I am out of health, and that it is all owing to my having been overworked at school—which is not true, you know. And he says that I am in danger of having a fit."

Quite a strong word, meant for the absent Zoar, broke from Pettifer's clerk. He coughed, and turned away his head to drown it. "Did he say what sort of fit?" he asked, turning it back again.

"He told mamma, and she told me," answered Lella. "Let me try to recollect—I don't know much about fits, you see, and forget their names. It was—yes, I think—apoplexy."

A sudden thought, giving rise to strange emotion, seemed to seize Pettifer's clerk. He stood still and gazed at his companion.

"Was it epilepsy?" he eagerly questioned.

"Why, yes; I quite remember now," she said. "That was it: epilepsy."

"Did you ever have such a thing before?"

"Never in all my life. Fancy," laughing a little, "my having had a fit of any sort!"

"It may be no laughing matter," he murmured in a half reproving tone. And then he was silent.

"Oh, and I forgot to tell you—he put me in a mesmeric sleep," she continued. "It was while he kept me in it that he told mamma what was the matter with me. I tell her that he only wants to doctor me for the sake of the fees it will bring him, and that the powders will be harmless, all flour and chalk. There comes Patsey: I see her at the end of the walk."

Pettifer's clerk turned to the innocent, prattling girl, took her hands in his in a very solemn fashion, and spoke in a solemn tone.

"I hope it may be so—that his powders will be harmless powders; but let me impress upon you one thing, Miss Clive—do not take more of his powders than you can help. Do not let him mesmerise you. Above all, pray attend to this—should you find that the powders affect you in any way, that they make you giddy, or sick, or drowsy, write me word at once. Will you promise to do this?"

"Yes," she answered, her pretty face one rosy blush. "But why? Would they be bad powders, do you fancy?"

"Never mind why," he said, his eyes, beautiful in their earnestness, gazing anxiously into hers. "I have only your welfare at heart in pressing this request upon you. Will you put your trust in me?"

"Yes, I will; I'll not forget," she said, lowering her own eyes in happy shyness. "Of course, you know all about powders, being John Pettifer's clerk."

A smile parted his lips. "I will whisper a secret to you," said he, "but you must let it lie between you and me. I am not John Pettifer's clerk, and I hardly know how the mistake arose. Had I been his clerk I should not talk and walk with you as I do now. I am a gentleman."

"Oh, yes," she answered eagerly, lifting for a moment her face; "I could see that from the first. I thought perhaps you were going to be a doctor, like John, and wanted to learn about drugs."

"May God protect you, my dear!" he whispered with strange emotion. "Remember."

When Patsey came within hearing, a moment afterwards, they were conversing soberly about the accumulation of dust in the road and the culpable negligence of the water-carts.

III.

For two days the powders furnished by Dr. Zoar did not appear to have any effect upon Miss Clive, good, bad or indifferent. On the third morning she had a slight attack of shivering, attended with nausea. Dr. Zoar, sent for by her mother in hot haste, became very angry when he arrived on the scene, protesting that no powder could have been administered to his patient that day, and that this indisposition was the result of the neglect.

"When once a course of these admirable powders has been entered upon it must be continued to the end, without interruption; I warned you of that, my dear madam, at the first," he said to Mrs. Clive.

"But Patsey says that she did give the powder this morning."

"And so I did, ma'am," struck in Patsey, with obstinacy. "I gave it directly after breakfast."

"Yes," said Eleanor, speaking for herself. "It is the powder that has made me ill."

"Of course it is!" cried the Doctor, twirling his fingers in derision.

"Well, sir, and I say the same as Miss Eleanor," cried bold Patsey. Upon which a curiously evil look shot out from his black eyes.

"I do wish, Dr. Zoar, you would not persuade mamma that I want these powders, for I am sure I do not," added Eleanor. "I don't think I can take any more of them."

A short scene ensued. The Doctor insisting that the powders were more necessary than anybody but himself knew or suspected, and must be taken; Eleanor objecting, and growing a little excited over it. Mrs. Clive wrung her hands, and was more helpless than a baby, except that she upheld Dr. Zoar. Woman's credulity! the world is full of it. I know dozens of ladies of intelligence who could not be induced to cut out a new flounce on a Friday.

The commotion ended by Dr. Zoar putting Eleanor into a mesmeric sleep, with a view, as he remarked, to calming her nerves. He then, pressing one of his hands upon her forehead and the other hand upon his own, "held commune with her spirit," or said he did. That over, he requested a private interview with Mrs. Clive, which took place in the drawing-room.

Dr. Zoar opened the conference with a gloomy look upon his face and a couple of sighs. "Madam," said he, "I have nothing good to impart to you. The inward mischief which, as I hinted to you, had already set in, has increased rapidly upon your daughter. I shall *not* be able to save her from epilepsy."

Mrs. Clive trembled from head to foot in her chair, stared, and gasped. She could not speak a word.

"I cannot save her from one or two attacks of it; indeed, unless I mistake, she has had a slight one to-day—and, my dear lady, I know that I do not mistake. But I can cure her yet; only she must be entirely under my charge.

"I will call in Dr. Pettifer," said the mother. "He will consult with you, and ——"

Dr. Zoar's brows darkened wrathfully. "No, madam," he interrupted, "I must treat this case alone. I am responsible to you to carry it through successfully, and I will do so. I have treated scores of such cases, and brought them all to a triumphant issue. But I require *your* co-operation in it."

"Mine!" cried Mrs. Clive, in dismayed alarm, for she held a mortal dread of personally attending on any kind of sickness. "In what way, Doctor?"

The Doctor drew his chair in front of Mrs. Clive, and bent his body forward; his voice took a low, impressive tone, his face wore its most persuasive aspect.

"My dear lady," he said, lifting his hand, "that maid—Patsey—no more administered the powder to your daughter than to you. She must be removed from attendance, and give place to a skilled nurse who understands this kind of illness. What I require of you is this—that you send Patsey away for a week or two. She must go out of

the house; it is absolutely essential. As you perceive, she is ready to uphold our dear patient in her little rebellious ways, and I cannot allow her to remain here."

"Oh, that's very easily done," said Mrs. Clive, immensely relieved. "I will give Patsey a fortnight's holiday to go to see her old mother in Hampshire—she is always ready for *that*. But how shall we find a suitable nurse, Doctor?"

"I will undertake it. I know of one who is the very thing—if we shall be fortunate enough to find her disengaged. Her terms are high; but ——"

"Never mind the terms; that's nothing," said Mrs. Clive imploringly. "What is her name? I know some of the nurses here."

"I don't think you know this one. Her name is Tamarin."

"Is she a West-Indian?" quickly asked Mrs. Clive.

Doctor Zoar's yellow skin took an unpleasant tinge under the light of the green Venetian blind. "Why do you ask?" he said.

"Because, is not Tamarin a West-Indian name? A friend of mine brought over a coloured woman from Barbadoes, and her Christian name was Tamarin."

The Doctor had had time to recover his suavity. "My dear lady, I have not put the question to her," he said, graciously. "Whether she may be a native of this place or the other is of no consequence. She is a skilful and attentive nurse, and I shall secure her for Miss Eleanor if I can. Meanwhile you will do your part by sending Patsey out of the house to-night."

Poor credulous Mrs. Clive! Patsey was safe away by nightfall, and Tamarin, who did not appear to have any other name, had taken her place. Dr. Zoar had been fortunate enough to find her "disengaged." It was the strange-looking woman with the sallow face and the cold, leaden, malignant grey eyes.

In a short time Spafield was electrified by the report that that sweet, bright girl, Eleanor Clive, had been attacked with epileptic seizures, the result of an overtaxed brain. Very slight, as yet, they were said to be. And people ran about remarking upon the mistaken wickedness of the high-pressure system of education in schools, and of trying to make girls learn as much as boys. Amidst those who heard the report was Pettifer's clerk.

"John," said he to his friend, bustling in to take his place behind the counter, where he might be often seen now, "there must be something devilish going on there."

"That's strong," remarked Mr. John Pettifer. "In what way?—and where?"

"With that charming girl," returned Pettifer's clerk, in excitement. "You know what they are saying about her."

"Well," said John, laconically, "the new system of education *is* a mistake. What on earth do girls want with all the languages, dead and living, and all the sciences under the sun? Will it make them

better wives and mothers? Stuff! When a sufficient number of minds have given way under it to make a stir, people will see its fallacy."

"You can't seriously believe that Eleanor Clive's mind has given way through overpressure!" retorted Pettifer's clerk.

"What, then, has done it?"

"Zoar."

"Zoar!"

"I believe it with my whole heart. He has induced these fits by his treatment; though what his object may be I cannot in the least imagine. The girl was bright and healthy as a girl can be; no more in danger of epilepsy than I am. Zoar, in conjunction with that diabolical nurse they have placed about her——Now don't laugh, John; the woman's countenance carries Satan upon it even more than his does; and that's saying a good deal."

"I agree with you," laughed John Pettifer. "But the woman's face, hard as it is, would not frighten people into epileptic fits."

Pettifer's clerk put his elbow on the counter, and brought his face close to John's. "Over in Jamaica," he said in a half whisper, "when our regiment was there, and I, as I have told you, was only a youngster in it, that man, Zoar, was thought to have dealings with the powers of darkness, he did such strangely clever things. Amidst his other accomplishments he could throw any one into a fit of epilepsy."

"Nonsense, Frank! Impossible!" said John Pettifer.

"As truly as that I am here, it was so," solemnly retorted Pettifer's clerk. "I have myself seen him try his power upon more than one subaltern. After administering a dose or two of some mysterious white powder, which powder he jealously guarded from the public eye, the poor fellow would froth at the mouth, his limbs would be convulsed, and he had all the appearance of being in the agonies of a fit. If it was not true epilepsy, it was the closest imitation of it ever seen; nevertheless some of our more experienced and older officers declined to believe that the fit was genuine epilepsy. Now I think he is trying the same thing upon Miss Clive."

"Why, the fellow must be a fiend!" exclaimed John Pettifer.

"He's worse than that," said Pettifer's clerk. "But what is to be done?"

John shook his head. He was of a cautious temperament. "No one has the right to interfere with Mrs. Clive," he said. "If you told her all this about Zoar, she would not believe it. She's infatuated with him."

"Could you not speak to your uncle, Dr. Pettifer? Ask him to drop in and see Lella, and see into what's going on there."

"I might ask him till the moon's blue; it would be all the same," said John Pettifer. "He would not interfere with Zoar; would not meet him in consultation for the world. There's no doctor of standing here that would do so. They call him a quack."

"Then is Lella to be abandoned to Zoar's mercy; to be allowed to die, or to go mad?" asked Pettifer's clerk, in fiery resentment.

"That's just like you, Frank—always in extremes," said John, coolly. "If Zoar is bringing on fits, or their semblance, he must be doing it from self-interest; to frighten the mother possibly, and chisel her out of a lot of golden guineas. But he won't carry the thing too far; rest assured of that: it would damage him with his other patients, his lady-worshippers. By-and-by little Lella will be pronounced well again. You'll see."

"I wish I could see! And I wish I could dive into the fellow's unholy motives!" growled Pettifer's clerk.

One of Dr. Zoar's motives, holy or unholy, was shortly made known to Mrs. Clive. It might not have been allowed to transpire quite so soon; but, perceiving that her daughter grew worse instead of better, Mrs. Clive's uneasiness increased, and she gathered up enough courage to tell Dr. Zoar that she must really call in further advice—that of Dr. Pettifer. Dr. Pettifer knew Eleanor's constitution: in fact, he had always attended the house until his old-fashioned mode of treatment had been superseded by the more brilliant skill of Dr. Zoar.

"Dear madam," said the Doctor, after a little pause spent in silent commune with himself, "there is only one thing that will restore your daughter. I have tried my best; but the malady is more powerful than my counteracting power; yet there is one way of cure left."

"What is it?"

Dr. Zoar played with his gorgeous watch-chain, as he took Mrs. Clive's hand and purred over it, like a cat purring over a mouse. "She must be instantly removed to a different climate, my dear lady; I think I should recommend Spain; and she must be married before she starts for it."

"Married!" exclaimed the astonished lady. "Why, she's not even engaged yet." And there she broke down into silence. "Who would marry her?" she added presently, out of a sea of bewildering ideas —"a girl who has epilepsy?"

"I would," said Dr. Zoar.

Mrs. Clive recoiled. Any notion of marrying her pet Doctor herself had never struck her, and she would have driven the thought away as unpalatable if it had: but she had liked the homage of the fascinating man very well, and it was a sort of blow to her vanity to hear of its being transferred to one younger and fairer than she. To think of Lella in connection with him was—well, profanation.

"Impossible!" she said, sharply.

Dr. Zoar toyed with his watch-chain and smiled, and stroked his silky whiskers.

"As you please," he answered, with careless suavity. "Of course, as you please. I show you the means, my dear lady, that will undoubtedly restore your child—a long sea voyage and a husband whose whole soul is devoted to her. Neglect those means, and

what remains for her?—repulsive suffering, and madness ending in death. It is my bounden duty to place before you these two alternatives."

"But Eleanor would not marry you to save her life," said poor Mrs. Clive, remembering another phase of the matter.

The Doctor smiled still and rubbed his hands softly. "My dear friend," said he, "there are ways and means to be used, in these cases, which overcome all objections. And your daughter must obey you. She is under age, you know."

"Yes, that's just it—she's under age," said the perplexed lady. "She *can't* marry without the consent of her guardians. It isn't only myself."

"Oh," said the Doctor, another smile effacing the keen, surprised light that shot from his eyes. "Who else is there?"

"One is Dr. Pettifer; the other is Colonel Matson. If Eleanor marries without their consent, she forfeits half her fortune."

"Dear me!—I really never knew that Miss Eleanor had any fortune to forfeit," said the unsophisticated man. "Is it much?"

"She has twenty thousand pounds on her wedding day. Only ten thousand if she marries without consent. And of course there'll be all mine later on, which is more than twice as much again."

"Poof!" cried the Doctor, veiling a greedy look of delight under his closed eyelids: "ten thousand pounds is a bagatelle, not worth the thought of an honest man. For my own part, I wish Miss Eleanor had no money whatever."

"How generous he is!" thought the Doctor's listener. "Yes; no doubt," she said. "But, you see, she cannot marry."

"I *don't* see it," returned the Doctor. "My dear madam, you must give the further management of this case over to me entirely."

But Mrs. Clive hesitated to do that, and she wanted to call in other advice. The Doctor argued and she argued; the one persuasively, the other tearfully and tremblingly. At length a compromise was effected: Dr. Zoar agreed to let the matter rest as it was for a couple of days longer, and Mrs. Clive undertook to leave it for that time in his hands.

The Doctor smiled, and rubbed his delicate fingers together softly, ran upstairs for a few moments' instruction to the nurse, then came back to take an affectionate leave, and went down the street, stepping gaily and humming an operatic air. Poor Mrs. Clive, distracted and unhappy, fell back in her rich velvet chair and indulged in a shower of tears.

IV.

BEFORE the sun had gained its meridian the next day but one, a report was circulating from one end of Spafield to the other that pretty little Lella Clive was very much worse, almost beyond recovery.

John Pettifer and Pettifer's clerk stood talking together behind the counter in the afternoon, the latter in a state of excitement bordering upon (as John told him) mania. One moment he declared he would have Mrs. Clive and Dr. Zoar taken for conspiracy, the next that he would set fire to the house and carry off Lella bodily.

While thus engaged, and when the shop was pretty full—for Pettifer's was not only the fashionable chemist's in the place, but also the best—another customer came in: a sallow-faced, frightfully thin woman, with cold, leaden, malignant grey eyes. Looking sharply around as if in a desperate hurry, she put a prescription into the hands of Pettifer's clerk, the only individual at that moment disengaged. John Pettifer was then talking with an old gentleman, and the shopmen opposite were serving against time.

"Make this up directly," said the woman. "I'll wait for it."

A strange gleam passed over the face of Pettifer's clerk. The prescription was as legible to him as if it had been written in Chinese; but he meant to get at its meaning, for all that.

"We cannot make this prescription up immediately,," said he, with the blandness of a polite shopman accustomed to wait on fashionable society. "It will require some little time."

"Then I must take it elsewhere," said the woman snappishly.

"It is from that great man, Dr. Zoar, I see," returned Pettifer's clerk, having made out the angular initials at the end, and speaking the name with reverence. "I thought the Doctor generally sent out his own medicines."

"But he has been called out of town in a hurry and hadn't time, so he scribbled the prescription and told me to get it made up at once. It is for a young lady who is in danger," returned the woman.

Pettifer's clerk seemed to reflect. "If it is wanted at once," he said, "that alters the case; particularly as Dr. Zoar is away. It is not usual to speak of these matters to anyone except doctors themselves, but the fact is Dr. Zoar, in his hurry, forgot to put down the quantity of each dose."

The leaden-eyed woman fell into the trap. "Oh, if that's all, I can tell you in a minute. She takes the little bottleful at one dose."

John Pettifer, having disposed of the old gentleman, who wanted some laudanum for toothache, now took the prescription into his hands. He understood it all. Mixing up the medicine himself, he wrapped the phial in white paper, sealed it, and handed it to the woman.

"You've not given me the prescription," said she, as she put down some money to pay. "I must take that back with me."

"When I have copied it," coolly spoke John Pettifer.

"Copied it! What do you want to copy it for?"

"We always copy our prescriptions," he quietly answered.

The woman looked doubtful and a little uneasy; her queer grey eyes glanced from him to Pettifer's clerk, and then back again. When the prescription was copied, John Pettifer cleverly put the copy into an

envelope, fastened it down and gave it to her, and she went out, not knowing that she did not carry with her the original.

"It's the queerest prescription and the ugliest that I ever made up in all my life," said John Pettifer to Pettifer's clerk.

"Would it bring on epilepsy?" was the eager question.

"Don't know what it would bring on, but I'm sure it's what a young girl ought not to take. I shall go and show it to my uncle. You can come with me. If he ——"

"If you please, sir, which is Pettifer's clerk?"

A butcher-boy in blue, shouldering an empty tray and wearing a face of enquiry, had come in and put the above question to John. John knew him, for his master was Pettifer's butcher. "What's the matter, Jacob?" he asked.

Jacob produced a letter and told his tale. He had been delivering some meat at Mrs. Clive's, when upon turning away from the door, a letter was dropped from one of the upper windows and fell into his tray. "Right slap into the tray itself, sir," said Jacob earnestly; "and when I looked at it and saw what was written on it, I thought I'd better bring it right off here at once."

The letter was addressed as follows: "Mr. Francis, Pettifer's clerk." And over the name these words were written, "Whoever picks this up, please deliver it!"

Pettifer's clerk tore the letter open, read the signature, put his hand in his pocket, and bestowed half-a-crown upon the astonished young butcher, who went up the street brandishing his tray in mad delight.

This was the letter:—

"Dear Mr. Francis,—I write to you because you told me to do so, and because I seem to have no other friends, and am frightened to death. I don't know whether I shall be able to get this sent to you, for Tamarin watches me like a cat, night and day. I am shut up in my chamber and am not allowed to leave it; for fear, Tamarin says, that I might have one of my fits. Mamma is completely led by Dr. Zoar, and thinks all he says or does must be right. It is my belief that the medicine which Dr. Zoar gives me brings on these fits. I never had them before I took the medicine, and was always quite well. This is how they come on: Tamarin will suddenly look at me and say: 'Miss Eleanor, I believe another fit is threatening! Your eyes are glassy and your face is flushed:' and then she gives me one of the powders. If I object, she calls in mamma, and then I am made to take it. In about twenty minutes I begin to feel very melancholy and sad; presently my head grows dizzy, and next I am suffering horribly. I tremble all over, and I am dreadfully sick. I know nothing more than that for what appears to be hours and hours, when I wake up, feeling ill and stiff, and Tamarin says, 'Miss Eleanor, you have had another fit.'

"Please take notice of three things that I say. First: I never had anything the matter with me before I took Dr. Zoar's

stuff. Second: I have an attack which he and Tamarin call epilepsy, every time I do take it. Third: Mamma said to me last night that Dr. Zoar wanted to marry me, and she asked me whether I would consent to do so. I told her I would rather die.

"Dear Mr. Francis will you, when you read this, do something to help me to try to escape from Dr. Zoar and Tamarin?

ELEANOR CLIVE."

"Let us go to your uncle, John," foamed Pettifer's clerk, crushing the letter into his pocket.

John went away there and then, leaving the shop to its fate and the shopmen, although it was the most busy hour of the twenty-four. Dr. Pettifer's house faced the Parade.

"Is my uncle at home?" asked John Pettifer, when the old man-servant opened the door.

"The master's out, Mr. John."

"Will he be long? Where's he gone?—do you know?"

"Into the country somewhere, sir. He went off with post horses to his carriage."

It was a serious check to the impatient applicants. They decided to go in and await Dr. Pettifer's return.

It was evening, and the street lamps were lighted when the physician returned home. He had keen, handsome features, and snow-white hair. John introduced his companion by his right name, and gave a brief explanation of their business and what they wanted Dr. Pettifer to do.

"Oh, so *you* are Pettifer's clerk, are you!" said the Doctor, smiling. "Well, now, you two young men, I cannot do what you ask. I would not interfere with Zoar if you paid me to do so. As to Lella, if she has a foolish mother, I can't help it."

"Would you not interfere to save Lella's life, Uncle Charles?"

"Save her life, boy! You speak strongly. Show me first of all that her life is in danger."

Upon that, Pettifer's clerk took up the story. He told Dr. Pettifer what he had known of Zoar in the West Indies; and he produced the letter, just received from Lella, and Zoar's prescription.

"Come along," cried the Doctor, all fire and fury now that he had mastered the facts. "There's no time to be lost."

Arrived at Mrs. Clive's, Dr. Pettifer walked straight through the hall, past the sitting-rooms, and up the stairs toward the chambers. The servant gazed after him.

"My mistress is in the dining-room still, sir," he said; "and Miss Eleanor has just had another fit."

On went the Doctor; John Pettifer and Pettifer's clerk following slowly in his wake. Dr. Pettifer had had the open prescription in his hand all the way. After a sharp knock at Lella's room door, he tried it and found it fastened.

"Open this door at once," he thundered.

The woman with the malignant grey eyes, startled and wondering, undrew the bolt and opened it an inch or two. Dr. Pettifer, who still had plenty of strength when he chose to put it forth, overpowered the woman, and pushed it open. Eleanor lay on the bed, tossing her arms wildly; her face scarlet and her eyes glazed.

"Fetch the police here; say I want them," called out Dr. Pettifer to the astonished man-servant, who had also come up.

The woman, Tamarin, knew Dr. Pettifer; she recognised the open prescription in his hand; she saw the two young men from the chemist's shop, and she probably felt that the game was up. The order to fetch the police, she did not like at all. Slipping into a small chamber close by, she caught up her bonnet and shawl and a small bag of things which belonged to her, and escaped from the house.

Probably the hardest thing in this life is for a woman to acknowledge she has been played upon. Mrs. Clive, when she came upon the scene, obstinately vowed that she would never, never believe Dr. Zoar was the villain they tried to make him out. Tamarin she did *not* like, and thought the woman might be no better than an ill-conditioned witch; but Dr. Zoar, a quack and a villainous impostor—oh, never, never!

"But he *is* one; he was no better than that in the West Indies years ago. Mrs. Clive, do pray listen to me——"

"You are Pettifer's clerk, I believe," freezingly interrupted Mrs. Clive. "I should like to ask what you do in my house? And you, John Pettifer, what are *you* here for?"

"I came with my uncle," answered John, glancing round at the doctor, who was bending over Lella. "This gentleman is not a clerk at all, but Captain Francis Colerane. Allow me to introduce him to you, Mrs. Clive: the son of Sir Thomas Colerane."

"Here, John," said the Doctor, scribbling a word on a leaf of his pocket-book—while Mrs. Clive stared at the stranger, and could not make matters out at all—"run to your place, and bring me this up with all speed. We'll soon have this poor child right again."

Lella was sinking into a troubled sleep. Dr. Pettifer, while waiting for the drug he had sent for, sat down by Mrs. Clive. He quietly related to her the whole history from beginning to end, as it had been told to him, and explained the dangerous nature of Zoar's prescription. Then Captain Colerane reported what he had known of Zoar in the West Indies. Then, while Mrs. Clive stared and sobbed, and very nearly collapsed with fright, John Pettifer came back with the antidote.

"And is it *really* not true epilepsy, Dr. Pettifer?" sighed the poor lady.

"Not a bit of it, ma'am. It is only the semblance of it—and a very good semblance, too, I must admit; might take in anybody but a medical man. Lella has no more had epilepsy than you have."

V.

WITHIN a very short time indeed, Eleanor Clive was her own bright self again, and Dr. Zoar had left the town for good. Warned, no doubt, by Tamarin, Dr. Zoar disappeared the same night. Tamarin also.

"My dear doctor," softly sighed Mrs. Clive one day, "if we are never to believe in a fascinating man like the quack Zoar, as you call him, what *are* we to believe in?"

"In common sense," answered Dr. Pettifer.

"Lella," whispered Francis Colerane a few minutes later, when they were left alone, "do *you* believe in anything?"

"I? Of course I do, Francis; in many things," answered Lella.

"Do you believe in love at first sight?"

"I don't know," stammered Lella, blushing and looking down.

"Because, my dear, I loved you from the very first moment I saw you, and I shall love you for ever."

Lella's cheeks grew hotter. She looked as though she might have confessed the same, etiquette and maiden modesty permitting.

"For ever and for ever," repeated Pettifer's clerk, with emotion. "We will travel life's road together, my best beloved, sharing its storms and its sunshine. And I trust that no shadow will come between us; none until that last shadow which comes to all, the solemn Shadow of Death. And that, you know, may be welcomed by us, for we shall be entering the realms of Immortality."

"Oh, dear, dear!" bewailed Mrs. Clive, when enlightened as to the position of affairs, "marry Eleanor! Why, my dear Captain Colerane, it would be nearly as bad for her as the fits."

"Indeed!—how would it be so?" smiled the Captain.

"Goodness gracious! As if I could allow my only child to go off to the West Indies with any wretched fighting regiment—and live there amongst the blacks! What do you take me for, Francis Colerane?"

"Well, our regiment has come home," he said; "I came with it; and I do not any longer belong to that regiment or to any other."

"But why?"

"Because my good old father is getting fanciful; he would not have his eldest son away from him any longer, he said, and ordered me to retire; so I had to obey. I had just sold out when I came to Spafield to look up John Pettifer. We were at school together; and a friendship took root between us, stronger and more lasting than is usually known to schoolboys. You will give me Lella, won't you, Mrs. Clive?"

"Well, under the circumstances, I—suppose I must. And—what do you say?—want to carry her off at once, to introduce her to your father and mother? Well, well, if it must be—but only for a week, mind you. Remember what trouble I have just gone through. I can't spare her longer just yet, even to Sir Thomas and Lady Colerane."

E. A.

THE GHOST OF BOLSOVER'S BANK.

By Joyce Darrell, Author of "The Sapphire Cross."

IT was one of those drenching afternoons in December, when roofs and pavements, gutters, umbrellas, and mackintoshes are transformed into so many mirrors for the reflection, more or less distinct, of lamp-rays. In such weather the rich hurry home joyfully, the poor slink miserably into sheltered corners; cabs drive a lively trade, and a railway station smiles on the travelling public like a haven of refuge on a storm-tossed mariner.

Into the six o'clock express for Barminster (a sweet and dreamy, old-fashioned, yet prosperous town on the Great Western line) two gentlemen leapt, almost as the train started. They were old acquaintances, formerly fellow-townsmen, and were glad to do the two hours' journey together.

One of them, as he settled down, gave a slight start and cast a glance of surprise towards a man seated in the corner farthest from himself. A shrunken, forlorn enough figure, clothed in a long grey ulster, and wearing a soft felt hat, which quite shaded the upper portion of his face, while the lower was disguised by a long iron-grey beard. Still there was nothing so very remarkable in his appearance as to explain the look, curiously compounded as that was of amazement and an odd sort of fear. The expression vanished in an instant, but nevertheless the feeling which had called it forth must have remained, for the gentleman gave a strangely nervous and misplaced little laugh when his friend abruptly said:

"So poor Bolsover's funeral is to be to-morrow!"

"Yes. You are going down for it, I suppose, Feilding?"

"Of course. They have sent me an invitation. The death was sudden, was it not, Gerridge?"

Mr. Gerridge nodded. He glanced towards the silent third passenger, who had shifted his position slightly, and was apparently dropping off to sleep.

"Strange fellow, poor Henry Bolsover!" resumed Mr. Feilding. "There's something extraordinary about his will, I hear."

"Extraordinary? You may well say so—at any rate as far as one of the bequests is concerned. In point of fact he has ordered £5,000 to be paid to himself."

"To himself?"

"Well, it amounts to that. £5,000 has to be put into his coffin. I suppose, if they do it at all, they'll put in a cheque, and meet the absurd clause in that way."

"How very strange!"

"For years past we have thought Bolsover a little queer. His odd, moody ways and his unsociability, and his peculiar style of dress, always like some artist-fellow, or——" The speaker broke off suddenly, and again glanced at the slumbering occupant of the distant corner seat.

"He was a bright enough fellow when we were young and I lived at Barminster," resumed the other. "He and his cousin, Ned Haviland, what bucks they were! So much alike in person too,—both handsome fellows, and rivals in every woman's favour."

"Ah, poor Ned! He died miserably, I fear," said Mr. Gerridge. "Wildness was in his blood. But I have often wondered whether, if old George Bolsover had been kinder about that money, or his son Henry, now lying dead, had shown himself more grateful to the kinsman who saved his life, Ned might not have made a better thing of his existence."

"It wasn't in old George to be kind. He was harder than his son, and that's saying a good deal. The present young fellow, Arthur, seems different, I believe."

"Yes. Arthur feels his father's death grievously—more than one could believe, considering how he has been treated. By the way, Littlejohn, the cashier, has not been told of Bolsover's death yet."

"You don't mean it! Why?"

"He has been ill—invalided for a month past—disease of the heart, and the doctors say any sudden shock might kill him. On the other hand he has been fretting terribly to get back to the bank, and is to return there in a day or two, and then, by degrees, the news is to be broken to him. Littlejohn worshipped his master."

"Well, it seems a queer affair altogether. How long have you been in London, Gerridge?"

"Only since yesterday. Had to run up for a little business."

When the train stopped at last at Barminster the two gentlemen were recognised by the porters and the station-master; the latter coming forward with a special greeting for him who was now nearly a stranger to it, Mr. Feilding.

"I hope you are well, sir? Bad weather; but the rain was wanted. Good evening, Mr. Gerridge: is this your bag? Anything else in the carriage?"

"Only another passenger, who seems asleep. By Jove! he's gone—slipt away like a ghost while we turned to speak to you," said Mr. Gerridge.

"Was he a gentleman of the town?" asked the station-master.

"Well, no—I hardly think so, unless ——" Mr. Gerridge did not finish his sentence, but smiled to himself, and half muttered—"Lucky I'm not superstitious! Good night, Jelf."

"Mr. Feilding has come down for the funeral to-morrow," remarked the station-master a few moments later to one of his subordinates.

"I could have sworn I saw Mr. Bolsover himself just now," re-

turned the ticket collector. "A man passed me his very image. It gave me quite a turn."

"More simple you!" said the station-master. "Mr. Bolsover is gone on his last journey, the bourne from which no traveller returns."

II.

At the late Mr. Bolsover's own house a mournful party sat down to dinner. The lawyer, Foljambe, had arrived, and one or two other guests—relatives of the family; they all were very grave, of course; and as for Arthur Bolsover himself, the only son and head of the house now, he was genuinely grieved. It did him credit that he should feel so much the loss of a father whose death set him free from a galling, sometimes even a cruel, bondage.

For his father had been the strangest, the gloomiest, in some respects the most tyrannical, of men. He was devoted to the bank, being a hard, keen man of business, and loving such money as he had for the sake of getting more. He unbent to no man, unless, indeed, on rare occasions to the cashier Littlejohn, who was a sort of pale reflection of himself in every way, and who entertained for his chief an instinctive, dog-like affection, into which terror entered as largely as respect.

The late Henry Bolsover would allow no partner in his bank, and accorded even to Arthur only the position of a clerk. He kept the young man miserably short of money; never confided any plans to him; and repelled all advances by his icy reserve. Yet Arthur felt a strange kind of pity for him, suspecting that he was not happy, and longing to penetrate the enigma of the inscrutable, stern, perhaps self-tortured nature. But he never could draw any closer to his father in spite of all his efforts. Of late, indeed, the breach between them had rather widened, for Mr. Bolsover wished Arthur to marry his cousin, Miss Martha Paunceford, who was something of an heiress, and Arthur had other views.

Miss Martha Paunceford was not at table. She was upstairs, keeping company with Mrs. Bolsover, who was arrayed in a lavish amount of new crape, and plunged in the deepest woe. Poor woman! Her married life had been anything but a bed of roses; but she liked being miserable, and enjoyed doing everything according to some standard of respectability that she had set up for herself. And having now so excellent a reason for ceremonial grief, she would not have suppressed one tear, or abated the tenth of an inch from the black border of her new pocket-handkerchiefs, for the world.

So she sat in her own room, shrouded in bombazine and semi-darkness; and Martha sat by her with an air of acid watchfulness, intended to repel all attempts at consolation on the part of a frivolous, outside world. This bank residence was commodious and handsome, the business premises being in front, the dwelling-rooms looking on to a large garden

"Is dinner over, Martha?" presently asked poor Mrs. Bolsover, after a fresh outburst of sobs.

"I will see, dear aunt," said the young lady. "Yes; the gentlemen are at their wine," she reported on her return.

"How they can drink it!" exclaimed the widow, and fell to weeping again.

"Men will do anything," said Martha.

"And the time getting on! Send Porter to te-tell Greaves that I must sp-speak to Arthur."

"Yes, dear aunt."

And Porter, who was the maid, having duly communicated with Greaves, who was the butler, Arthur, in the course of a few minutes appeared.

His mother, naturally, began to sob with loudness the instant he entered the room, that being the way in which she had received everybody for four days past. Arthur, his handsome young face looking pale and grief-worn, sat down beside her, and waited in patient silence for her tears to expend themselves.

"What have you decided to do?" quavered Mrs. Bolsover at last.

"We are as much puzzled as ever, mother. Foljambe thinks we can disregard the clause altogether."

"Disregard? Not with my consent, Arthur. Nobody shall ever say that I disobeyed a single injunction of your poor dear father's."

"But, mother, this particular injunction is so preposterous."

"I am surprised at you, Arthur. Preposterous is not a word you should use on this solemn occasion. Your dear father wished the money to be put in his coffin, and it shall be done."

"But how?" cried Arthur, adding with a sort of mournful humour, "Am I to write a cheque and put it there?"

"Write a cheque by all means if that be sufficient," replied Mrs. Bolsover, with dignity. "I don't profess to understand business-matters. I never did. I have always considered such things to lie outside the sphere of woman. But where my conscience or heart is concerned, my instinct does not err. And although of course I am nobody now that your dear father has been called away from me, still, wherever my weak voice can be raised in support of his wishes, I hope to make it heard. Mr. Foljambe may say this or that, and anyone whose judgment you prefer before mine may say the other, but I, as your surviving parent, feel it my duty to maintain that the money should be paid."

Arthur drew a cheque book from his pocket. He had not long been in possession of any object so important; but a few days before his death Mr. Bolsover, albeit sorely against the grain, had been forced to confer on his son the power to sign.

With a melancholy smile he wrote the cheque for £5,000 in favour of Henry Bolsover, not substituting "order" for "bearer" as he generally did, but letting the latter printed word stand. Then he handed

it to his mother, saying rather wearily: "Will you put it in yourself? The lid should be nailed down in an hour from now."

Renewed sobs; then Mrs. Bolsover began again: "Certainly, I will put it in, Arthur. I cannot conceive that any hands have a better right than mine to touch your dear father. It is a painful duty—the whole of this discussion, indeed, has been deeply painful. But now that I have triumphed, as right must always triumph, it shall not be said that I faltered at the eleventh hour through any yielding even to my natural grief."

And with her handkerchief pressed once more to her eyes, and with Martha preceding her, she swept slowly from the room. Arthur did not follow her. The whole proceeding connected with the cheque seemed to him a mockery.

The room in which the coffin was placed had been Mr. Bolsover's dressing-room. Things, by his widow's wish, had been left exactly as they were on the evening when, while dressing for dinner, he had been seized with his brief and fatal illness. Even the watch and a ring which he always wore lay upon the toilet-table. Some perverse notion of reverence—a quaint, superstitious feeling—made Mrs. Bolsover's desire that they should so remain until he was fairly gone; then she intended herself to collect and put away everything.

The coffin was placed in front of a large bow-window—rather an anomaly in a dressing-room—but the house was an old one, and full of anomalies. Across this, thick red curtains were closely drawn. A fire burned in the grate, a lamp dimly lighted was on the table. The atmosphere of the room was heavy with the scent of the flowers which, in beautiful profusion, covered all but the stern face of the dead. Sometimes the departing soul leaves on the countenance a smile, a look that is as a message by which the living may gain of the vanished one some fuller, more loving comprehension than ever before. But the face of Henry Bolsover had been impenetrable, living: it remained impenetrable, dead.

Mrs. Bolsover approached, lifted some of the blossoms covering the crossed hands, laid the cheque there, replaced the flowers, and turned away.

"We are to stay, I think you said?" observed Martha.

"*I* stay, of course, Martha."

Then she buried her face and sat down by the fire, while Martha went to the open door and held whispered parley with some of the servants in the corridor.

"What a draught comes from that window! It actually stirs those heavy curtains," she remarked, with a shiver, as she returned and her self approached the welcome blaze.

Two or three men presently entered. The coffin was nailed down; and, when the dreary office was quite completed, Mrs. Bolsover suffered her niece to lead her away.

A few hours later, guests and servants in the silent house had retired to bed and were sleeping soundly.

Mrs. Bolsover, poor thing, after weeping herself into a condition of nervous exhaustion, had dropped into uneasy slumber. It was broken by strange dreams.

In their respective rooms Miss Martha Paunceford and Arthur Bolsover still sat by the fire, lost in thought. The death of the head of the house affected the destiny of each. Both were now set free to go their own way and please themselves : a contingency simply undreamed of as long as the tyrannical rule of Mr. Bolsover had lasted.

Miss Paunceford had been his ward, enjoying hitherto but a very slender income. She was not to come into the bulk of her property until her thirtieth year, to which she was now close. Mr. Bolsover had been at no pains to conceal that he should like her to marry Arthur.

The young man, however, showed no eagerness to meet these views ; and Miss Paunceford (who, when she had nothing else to be proud of, had piqued herself on common sense) possibly disgusted at her cousin's coldness, had done a very foolish thing. She had clandestinely engaged herself to the greatest ne'er-do-weel in Barminster, and met him in secret with the zest of seventeen.

She had seen him this very afternoon. He had stolen in the dusk through the shrubbery and the garden to hold stolen converse with her at the deserted study-window.

They had been disturbed by approaching footsteps, and Miss Paunceford had fled, as she now remembered, without shutting the window. She began drowsily to wonder whether anyone had shut it later—whether she should go down to see ; and while thus wondering she dropped asleep in her chair.

Arthur Bolsover had other thoughts ; yet they also ended in a love reverie. He had been looking over letters and papers of a date long past, and they had revealed to his knowledge many things which before he had only guessed at. Very present to his mind was poor Ned Haviland, that cousin of his father's, once so bright and happy, who had suddenly left Barminster to plunge into the seething struggle, the vice and misery of London : only to be heard of again years afterwards, when a paragraph in a newspaper stated that he had been picked up from under the wheels of a cab, and carried, maimed and wounded, to a hospital.

Arthur recollected this circumstance and the stir which it made in Barminster, where Haviland was still pityingly remembered by some of the friends of his youth. These had come forward and made up a sum of money, which they sent to the injured man ; only, however, to have it returned to them by one of the officials of the hospital, who stated that "Mr. Haviland refused to accept it."

Mr. Bolsover had been bitterly censured for refusing to subscribe one penny to this little fund, and Arthur, though only a boy at the

time, could recall the look of gloom and hatred that came into his father's eyes whenever Ned's name was mentioned. A little later some person of more benevolence than discretion had inquired of Mr. Bolsover for news of Haviland, and been curtly answered that he was dead. All this, and more, Arthur revolved in sorrow and shame, for within the past hour he had learnt beyond the possibility of doubting that his father had behaved towards his kinsman with a black and base ingratitude. Had he felt remorse? Arthur wondered. Was it the memory of a great service which he had never rewarded that had cast such a shadow over his later years; made him so silent and reserved; haunted him always like a spectre of the past, and explained, perhaps, some of the eccentricities which for years before his death were rapidly gaining for him the reputation of semi-madness?

Oh! for one moment in which to speak to the dead—to lift the veil that shrouded that inscrutable, silent mind; to penetrate the secret of its struggles; perhaps, with wider comprehension, to feel able to pity and forgive! Vain longing! felt through countless generations by the side of every grave, and destined thus to be felt to the end.

Arthur roused himself with a sigh. All at once some softer thought came into his mind, and brought a tender smile to his lips. He put his hand into his breast-pocket and drew out the portrait of a young girl—a lovely, wistful little face, that looked at him with sweet, confiding eyes.

"My darling," murmured Arthur, "our sad days are over now. No more hardship—no more toil." And then he turned back to the old letters.

He was interrupted by a shriek—a cry of wildest terror, that rang through every corner of the silent house. Arthur thought it came from near his mother's room, on the floor below his own. To rush to the door and downstairs was the work of an instant. He was joined on his way by Martha—no whit less scared than himself. Above and below doors were opening and guests and servants alarmedly peering.

On the long and broad landing in front of her own bedroom—a landing fitfully illumined only by the waning moon as it emerged at intervals from heavy banks of clouds and poured its light through one unshuttered window, Mrs. Bolsover was stretched in a deathlike faint. They lifted her and carried her to the bed—chafed her hands, bathed her temples. At last she unclosed her eyes, looked about her wildly and gasped: "Where is he? Has he spoken?"

"He? Who? My dear mother, what has alarmed you?" enquired Arthur tenderly.

Her trembling hands closed round his, and she answered hoarsely:

"It was your father, Arthur. I awoke suddenly with a strange feeling of alarm. I felt I could not be longer alone, and got up to go to Martha's room. As I reached this door I saw your father. I

FRANK DADD. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

SUDDENLY THE FIGURE STRETCHED OUT ITS THIN WHITE HAND, ADORNED WITH THE CORNELIAN RING.

saw him leave the dressing-room and go downstairs in the direction of his study ——"

She stopped shudderingly, and several of her hearers drew together with looks and words of alarm. Every morning Mr. Bolsover had risen at dawn to go to his study: and there was not one member of his household but could realize with terrifying vividness the scene described by the widow.

"It was a dream," said Arthur, soothingly.

"Or a burglar, perhaps," suggested the practical voice of Mr. Foljambe from the doorway. "I should search the house."

Miss Paunceford glided swiftly away. She recollected the window left open by herself in the study, and was anxious to close it before the butler should arrive and have his reminiscences aroused or ideas stirred up. If he really had seen her talking to a man, and happened to mention it, an awkward cross-examination would be the result, and her reputation for common-sense be rudely and prematurely destroyed.

The window *was* open: she hastily and softly shut it; then met the others at the door and said carelessly: "There is no sign of disturbance here."

Nor was there anywhere, although the house was searched from top to bottom. The dressing-room itself was examined; the coffin was undisturbed; and of all the objects of value scattered on the toilet-table but one was found missing—namely, a curious old cornelian ring that Mr. Bolsover had worn always.

"No burglar would take that and leave the rest, so it has doubtless rolled away somewhere," said Mr. Foljambe, who by this time had adopted Arthur's idea of a dream, and was anxious to return to his warm bed. But Mrs. Bolsover maintained that it was no dream—that she had seen the spirit of her dead husband. She was not left alone again that night.

The next day the funeral was celebrated with befitting state, and on the following morning Bolsover's bank, closed the day of the funeral, opened its doors again to the public.

Arthur went down early, signed a few letters, transacted some necessary business; and hurried away at ten o'clock, partly because he had urgent need to go to London, partly because he wished to avoid Mr. Littlejohn, the cashier, who, after a month's illness, was returning later that morning to the bank.

"You must put off the poor old fellow with as plausible a story as you can," said the young man to his chief clerk. "The news of my father's death must be broken to him by degrees. He will see the cheques signed by me of course—so just say that my father has been ailing. And do caution all the clerks not to let the truth slip out suddenly, for the shock might kill Littlejohn, with his weak heart. It is his having been away at the time that will try him."

Arthur departed. Shortly afterwards Mr. Littlejohn appeared—a small, wizened, punctilious little man, looking tinier and dryer than

ever after his late illness. He had not many ideas—his mind being mostly furnished with ledgers—but he had one creed, one faith, and one religion, and that was an unconquerable devotion to Mr. Bolsover.

He was afraid of him, of course, as everybody had been, but anything so blasphemous as disapproval of his master never crossed Mr. Littlejohn's mind. In a feeble way he imitated his chief, glaring as sternly as he could at the clerks, talking to them about nothing but business, and never asking them a question if it could possibly be avoided.

They watched him with curiosity on this morning when he returned to the Bank, and after the manner of their kind, took a certain grim pleasure in his glance of surprise at not seeing Mr. Bolsover, and his start of amazement at recognising Arthur's signature on the cheques.

"The governor's away," said the youngest and most flippant of the clerks. "Has left Mr. Arthur in charge. Gone off on unavoidable business, I should say."

Mr. Littlejohn cleared his throat a little nervously. He was very much astonished, but would have died just then rather than ask a question; and was so much bent on concealing his own feelings that he failed to note the ghoul-like amusement depicted on the countenances of the clerks.

He worked in his routine fashion all day, but was strangely put out by the absence of his master, and what with that and his recent illness, he felt weak in the head and confused. He sat in his own den—next the master's private room, and his only companion was the youngest of his subordinates, Mr. Capper: the youth who had communicated to him the news of the "Governor's" absence. The other clerks were in the big middle room, where they waylaid all customers and impressed on these that the cashier was to hear no word as yet of the death of Mr. Bolsover.

In fact they kept business from him as much as they could; which was fortunate for Mr. Littlejohn, as otherwise he never could have remained at his post to the end. For he felt with humiliation that he was far feebler than he thought. His head was buzzing—his heart gave little warning knocks at intervals, and his eyes were even dimmer than usual. At all times he had wretched sight, being obliged to wear one sort of glasses for writing and another sort for seeing anyone half a yard off.

The day was horribly dark and dreary, and the gas had to be lighted at three o'clock, but still Mr. Littlejohn plodded on, blinking at his figures and adding them up, while secretly, half unconsciously wearying all the time for the sight of his chief's stern face. He did not—although quite unaware of relaxing in any way—keep nearly as sharp a look out as usual over the clerks; and Mr. Capper for one took advantage of this to sit with his back turned to the old fellow, and became absorbed in the pages of a very amusing novel.

Half-past four. Mr. Littlejohn cleared his throat again. He could hold out no longer: he must ask one question.

"Will Mr. Bolsover soon be home, do you know?"

"Eh! what? home? Oh! to-night or to-morrow, I believe," airily responded Mr. Capper, who had not the faintest idea of what he had been asked.

Fresh silence ensued, broken only by the faint scratching of Mr. Littlejohn's pen—the furtive turning of the leaves of Mr. Capper's book.

"To-night or to-morrow morning." Then the next day Mr. Bolsover would be at the Bank. This was the cashier's thought, and he felt strangely glad; his heart even beat a little quicker.

Over the desk where he sat, as over that occupied by Mr. Capper, a lamp covered by a large green shade made a wide circle of light, but the rest of the room was in semi-darkness, and no point was so obscure as the door which led into the principal's private room. All at once Mr Littlejohn heard a sound there—a familiar slight creaking of the hinges, and looking up quickly, and peering into the shadow, he beheld a well-known tall figure, with a long grey beard and a soft felt hat pulled low over its brows; the figure of his master.

"Mr. Bolsover! I am glad to see you, sir," said the little cashier, his voice quavering with eagerness and almost soundless; somewhat breathless too from the quickened beating of his heart. He half rose but had to sit down again quickly, for his head swam and his sight felt more dim than ever.

It did not strike him as at all strange that Mr. Bolsover made no reply, for he was a silent man at the best of times. Besides, he might have answered, only Mr. Littlejohn could not hear very well just then because of the surging in his ears.

Silently the figure stretched out its thin white hand, adorned with the cornelian ring, and laid a cheque on the desk in front of Mr. Littlejohn: then drew back some paces into the shadow, as though annoyed by the glare of the lamp, a thing not to be wondered at when you have just emerged from darkness.

Mr. Littlejohn made out the amount of the cheque, which was drawn and signed by Arthur, and at first was surprised at its magnitude—£5,000. On reflection, however, he felt confirmed in a suspicion that had crossed his mind several times that day—namely, that Mr. Bolsover had gone away on business connected with some investment. Mr. Littlejohn even fancied he knew what it was, and thought £5,000 a very well-chosen sum for the purpose.

To get the bundle of notes out of the iron safe was the work only of a few moments, and Mr. Littlejohn, returning to his desk, counted them out before his master, the latter standing motionless all the time, except for a nervous movement of one hand. With the thumb he kept moving the cornelian ring on the little finger backward and forward until at last the ring flew off, alighted on the desk, rebounded from thence and fell to the ground.

Mr. Littlejohn—although to do so made his head much worse—stooped to pick the ring up—fumbled about after it for a moment—found it and, on looking up to restore it to the owner, discovered that the figure with the grey beard and the soft felt hat had vanished as noiselessly as it had come. But it had carried the notes away with it. Mr. Capper at the same moment having finished a particularly thrilling chapter, became aware that something unusual had been going forward, and looked round with his ordinary happy insouciance. But he saw nothing except that poor old Littlejohn, very pale, was sitting with his head supported by his hand, and holding out a cornelian ring, which gave Mr. Capper an odd little start when he recognized it.

"I—I don't feel very well," said the cashier. "Will you please take this ring back to Mr. Bolsover."

Mr. Capper stared. Was the poor old man raving? "Mr. Bolsover?" he uttered.

"Yes," said Littlejohn dreamily, for everything in the room was beginning to dance before his eyes. "He was here this moment, getting a cheque cashed."

"My goodness!" ejaculated Mr. Capper, starting from his stool, and then standing speechless, his eyes dilating, and beads standing on his forehead. "It couldn't have been Bolsover." Littlejohn looked at him with some impatience.

"Is it so strange," he said icily, "that Mr. Bolsover should come in to his own bank, and cash a cheque?"

This was too much for Capper. Surprise and terror robbed him of prudence. He could not stand there and listen to such ghastly nonsense.

"That's good!" he exclaimed ironically. "Strange? Uncommonly strange, I should say, as the governor was buried yesterday."

Mr. Littlejohn seemed to gather himself up with one great effort as he listened. He rose slowly to his feet: fixed eyes of mad, beseeching anguish on the eager young face before him, then gave a stifled cry, threw his hands out despairingly, and dropped to the floor.

The news of his master's death had killed him!

III.

What excitement reigned in the bank, and later in Barminster! When Mr. Capper, pale as a sheet, stuttered out the tale to his fellow clerks in the next room and the few customers present, they thought at first he had gone mad. But there, on poor old Littlejohn's desk, lay the cheque of which all had heard, and the cornelian ring which all recognised.

The very fact of Mr. Capper himself having been in the same room with the apparition and yet hearing and perceiving nothing seemed another supernatural element in the strange and incredible story.

Like wildfire the news spread. Added to what had been seen by Mrs. Bolsover, it was supernaturally strange. Then Mr. Gerridge, although half incredulous, came forward to say he had seen the ghost in the train. And the ticket-collector swore to it also, and a cow-boy declared that in the grey dawn he had met the late Mr. Bolsover striding across the fields that led to another railway station, and had been so frightened that he ran miles away. Lovers of the supernatural, who were just as numerous in Warminster as elsewhere, had a rare harvest. Arthur was telegraphed for from London, and arrived with all speed, looking very grave and stern.

Of course, there were some minds which inclined to a natural explanation, and desiring that Arthur should put the matter in the hands of the police. Among these was Mr. Feilding, who was remaining in the town for a few days. "I saw no ghost in the railway carriage," he said. "In fact I hardly remember that there was anybody but Gerridge and myself there. But of course I take his word for there having been a man present who wore a felt hat and had a long beard and (unfortunately) must have heard our conversation. That young fool, Capper, admits now that he was reading a novel which absorbed all his attention at the time the cheque was cashed: and as for poor old Littlejohn, we all know he was half blind. The evidence of the ticket-collector and the cow-boy, if it be worth anything at all, carries out the idea that somebody was personating your father. Under these circumstances, my dear Bolsover, I cannot conceive why you do not take measures to have the offender discovered if possible."

Arthur seemed unwilling to answer, but at last said reluctantly: "There is so much that is mysterious in the business. When can the cheque have been abstracted? From the moment that she herself laid it on my father's hands until the lid of the coffin was nailed down, my mother never left the room."

"The cheque cashed by Littlejohn may have been forged," said Mr. Feilding.

"No. It was the same cheque," said Arthur.

"Humph!" said Mr. Feilding, for the first time rather staggered. "So you believe in the ghost?"

But to this Arthur made no reply, and his visitor put an end to the conversation.

"That young Bolsover has some reason for his conduct," he said later to Mr. Gerridge. "There positively are moments when I think he got the cheque cashed himself."

"Impossible," said Mr. Gerridge. "I have been talking about it to Miss Paunceford, who says that nobody but herself and her aunt was present when the cheque was put in the coffin, and they saw the lid nailed down almost immediately afterwards."

"Without quitting the room in the interval?"

"Yes."

And out of this circle there was no getting, though the whole town talked and talked and started every possible theory, one more extraordinary and fantastic than the other.

Meanwhile Arthur Bolsover went quietly about his usual avocations, apparently resigned himself to the loss of the £5,000, and in a short time took another journey to London.

IV.

A LITTLE room in London. To enter it seemed at first like a glimpse of enchantment, so striking was the contrast which it made with the squalor and the dreariness of the dripping streets.

For the only tenant of the room was a young girl—pale, sad-looking, but exquisitely pretty—who was busily engaged binding into garlands and sprays a wealth of lovely hot-house blossoms which lay heaped on wet moss in front of her. The Parma violets, the roses, tuberoses and japonicas made a glory of fragrance and colour in the lowly room. Lowly it was, yet pretty also, as far as neatness and taste and care can redeem a too evident poverty. A bright fire burned in the tiny grate ; and curled up in the centre of the hearthrug lay a lordly Persian cat—a superb creature, which seemed to be condescendingly making the best of its humble surroundings.

The last wreath was finished, and the young girl had just murmured to herself: "Now I wonder if the boy will let them fade before he fetches them"—when the sound of a step on the stairs brought a vivid colour to her cheeks and a look of breathless expectation to her eyes.

A knock at the door. She flew towards it, but had hardly time to cry "Come in" when it opened to admit Arthur Bolsover.

"You !" she cried in surprise, yet with unspeakable gladness. He drew her towards him and kissed her before he answered.

"I saw no reason why I should not present myself here boldly now. I am tired of waiting round corners to catch a fugitive glimpse of you, Ruth. Besides, I wished to speak frankly at last to your father."

"He is still away," she said, sorrowfully.

A curious expression crossed Arthur's face ; but instead of replying to her observation he looked at the flowers and said lightly :

"Why, what is this ? Has Hafiz been whisked off in the night in the lap of some witch mounted on a broomstick, and did he bring you all these treasures from his native land of the sun ?"

"No. The explanation is more prosaic. Some florists at the West End recognised a talent for mounting flowers in your humble servant ; and they pay me rather handsomely for a delightful occupation."

"Rather handsomely ! Sixpence an hour, I suppose, and you toil at these all the evening, after running about to teach all day. Well, thank heaven those days are over, Ruth," Arthur said fervently.

"Over?" repeated Ruth dreamily. "You mean that you are free now: but there is still my father's consent to win."

"And you think he will hate me always because I am my father's son? Poor old man! I have discovered to my sorrow and my shame that he had better cause for his enmity than I ever before guessed," said Arthur sadly.

He drew her to a seat near the fire and sat down beside her, holding her little hand in his, and caressing it softly while he spoke:

"You know the sad story in part, Ruth, my darling, although you have been too kind and generous ever to tell it to me. When I tried to argue that your father's hatred of mine was perhaps exaggerated and misplaced you never contradicted me. But now I have learnt the truth. I know that in their childhood and early youth our fathers loved one another like brothers, and that once when at school my father's life was saved by the courage and devotion of yours. This service should never have been forgotten, whatever happened in after years; but, alas! when the two young men were grown up, jealousy came between them, for they both loved the same woman, and their friendship was changed to enmity. All this you know probably; and also that the Havilands, being as wild and extravagant as the Bolsovers were hard and close-fisted, the latter, through a succession of mortgages, became possessed of all their kinsman's land. My grandfather foreclosed at last, and then by a strange, unlucky chance, within a very few hours after the transfer of the property, a lead mine was discovered on the Haviland property, which—had he only known of it sooner—would have enabled your grandfather to pay the mortgage three times over."

"All this I have heard," interposed Ruth softly. "I know, too, that as soon as he learnt the existence of the mine, my grandfather entreated old George Bolsover to give him at least £5,000, and this prayer was denied. But these things are past now, Arthur. What do these dead-and-gone enmities matter to you and to me?"

"I should like to tell you everything," said Arthur. "It seems to me a kind of expiation to do so. My father remained deaf to their claims, Ruth, but I do believe that remorse for his own ingratitude embittered his after life. During the closing months of his existence he was stern and silent, inscrutable to the strangest degree. I have told you already of the singular clause in his will. The sum he named—£5,000—strikes me as suggested to him by the memory of the appeal which he had once so cruelly spurned. Heaven knows what strange, distorted form the idea may have taken in his warped and failing brain; but he may have thought that by ordering the sum to be buried with him, and thus sterilising it, he would remove some curse that might otherwise have clung to his descendants."

"No curse would ever have clung to you," said Ruth.

Arthur bent his head with a kind of passionate humility. "Then you forgive us?" he said. "You forgive your father's wasted life and your own youth of toil and privation?"

"We shall never have to forgive, but always to love one another, I hope," she answered tenderly. "But my poor father! Is it not strange how the idea of wringing those miserable £5,000 out of his old enemy seemed to have taken possession of him just during the last few weeks? I tried to dissuade him from going to Barminster, when he heard of the death, but my prayers were of no use. I longed to tell him of you, Arthur, and to promise in your name that one day all the wrong should be righted. Perhaps now, when he comes back and sees you, and is told everything, we may persuade him to bury his hatred in your father's grave."

"God grant it!" said the young man. But his face wore a troubled look; and he added, almost as if speaking to himself: "I wish he were at home again!"

"And I!" cried Ruth. "Think how I wish it! All these lonely evenings I have been wearying for him as I sat here with no company but Hafiz, while working at my flowers."

"Tell me," said Arthur, "did your father mean to go anywhere but to Barminster?"

She shook her head sorrowfully. "He had barely money enough even for that one journey, more especially as by a curious freak he chose to go first-class; I accompanied him to the train. I cannot think why he does not return. And he must be absolutely in want of food, unless ——" She stopped abruptly, turning a little pale, and the tone of her last words changed to a cadence of pain.

"My dear, do not think of that," said Arthur, soothingly. But the fear which had occurred to her found an echo in his own heart.

For poor Ned Haviland had of late years sought a refuge in opium-eating from the ills of poverty and helplessness and the agony of an incurable disease; and when the craving took him, which was only at intervals, he would leave his home and remain in hiding somewhere for days. He had been better during the last few months, and Ruth had been happier about him. While patient and courageous and loving always, she had never known what it was to be positively happy until the day when a strange chance led to her meeting Arthur Bolsover at the house of one of her pupils.

He had been struck by her name, and was interested in her for her beauty and her charm. Then began the little idyl which for a whole year had secretly brightened both their lives. Ruth dared as little speak of him to her father as Arthur ventured to hint at *her* existence to Mr. Bolsover: but they met in secret when they could: they were both young, and they felt they could afford to wait.

"There he is!" suddenly cried Ruth, springing up, her quick ear having again caught the sound of a step on the stairs.

The footfall stumbled. She gave a scared look, and rushing to the door threw it open. On the threshold, gaunt, and spectral-looking from want of food and mental struggle, stood Haviland; and Arthur, although prepared for the resemblance, could not help starting at

the extraordinary although superficial likeness between him and his father.

They were of the same height and build, and wore the same long iron-grey beard; while the resemblance was strangely heightened by an accidental similarity of costume. The shabby ulster and soft felt hat were natural enough garments for poor Ned Haviland to wear, although they had seemed oddly out of place in Barminster when worn by the rich Mr. Bolsover.

"You are ill, papa," said Ruth, tenderly, while her anxious eyes scanned his haggard face. "Sit down; and see—here is a friend."

Arthur moved forward, but no sooner did Haviland look at him than he shrank backwards with a gesture of terror. Doubtless he had caught sight of Arthur at Barminster, and now recognised him.

"The money was mine—mine by right!" he cried out hoarsely, in tones of mingled alarm and rage. "I could not wrest it from him living: I took it from him, dead: and I did it—for her!"

With a movement of yearning appeal he indicated Ruth, then swaying suddenly forward, he fainted.

"Oh, what does it all mean?" cried Ruth, terrified, as she sank on her knees beside the insensible form.

"Hush! it means nothing that you need fear, Ruth," said Arthur; and, gathering the poor, thin form in his strong arms, he laid it gently on a couch.

Medical aid was brought, and the best of nourishment administered. But Haviland, although he lingered for some days, never rallied or recovered enough consciousness even to recognise his daughter.

She found the bank-notes on him, and dimly guessing what she feared to express, she would have given them to Arthur. But he said, gently: "They are yours, Ruth. Do not ask any questions now. Later you shall know as much as I can tell you."

For of course the actual details of the theft: the moment in which the idea of it took form in Haviland's weakened brain: the precise manner in which he executed it; were a mystery still and have so remained to this day. The probability was that, hearing the curious proviso mentioned in the railway carriage, he had entered the house stealthily, was hidden behind the heavy curtains when Mrs. Bolsover placed the cheque in the coffin, and at once took it out, and made good his escape later.

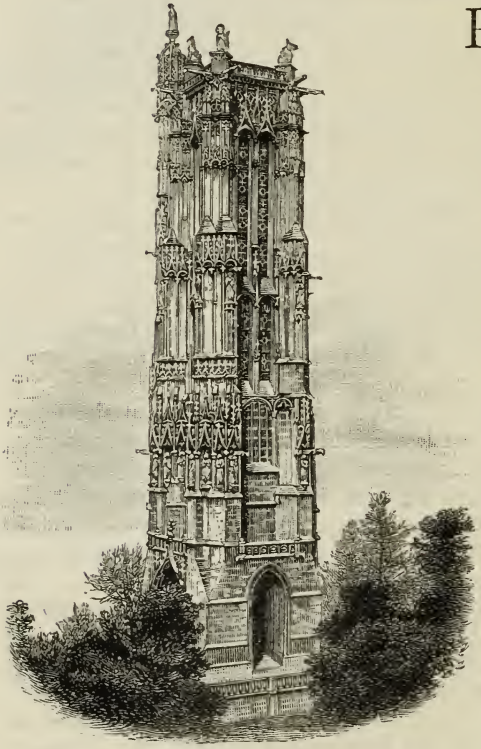
And although when, some months later, Arthur Bolsover took his bride to Barminster and introduced her as poor Ned Haviland's daughter, Mr. Gerridge thought he began to see daylight in a very obscure business, he did not communicate his suspicions to anyone; and for lovers of the supernatural there is no more thrilling or inexplicable instance of their theories to be adduced, than the story of how £5,000 were spirited away some years ago by the ghost at Bolsover's Bank.

POT-POURRI.

FOUR SCENES ON FRENCH GROUND.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," &c.

FIRST SCENE.



Tour St. Jacques.

PONT DE BRIQUES. One of those lovely days that come to us only occasionally. A day to make you feel that there is a great deal of heaven upon earth, and the gates of paradise are nearer than you thought for. A day all sunshine; soft, balmy, yet bracing air, blue and liquid sky. White, fleecy, floating clouds, threw rapid lights and shadows upon the landscape.

We were sitting in the garden—the two Hs. and the present writer —— how distinguish these two Hs. one from the other?——waiting for Madame Monroger, of the Hôtel Monroger, Pont de Briques, to announce our mid-day refreshment.

The scene might have found a corner in the garden of Eden before the serpent tempted Eve: chiefly, perhaps, because to-day its principal charm came from heaven itself: that wonderful atmosphere, sky and sun. Fruit trees in the orchard were in full flower, an apparently endless extent of pink and white blossom. Occasionally a stronger breeze sent down a shower of petals, more beautiful than snow flakes, more rosy than the morn, strewing the ground with a carpet Titania and her court might have desired. Taller trees immediately about us, bearing no manner of fruit, swayed and murmured, and seemed to invite us to closer communion. But

possessing no key to the language of trees, we could only sit and listen to the unknown tongue, and feel that its melody touched a corresponding chord in the human heart. The two boys were swinging.

Suddenly, from one of the branches almost overhead, came forth a note, rich, velvety and unmistakable. It was the jug-jug of the nightingale, and H. major and minor came down to listen, enraptured, as to a discovery in the world of nature. In their young lives they had never yet heard a nightingale. But for our own part, we were at once carried in spirit to a far-off Alpine range, where under the shadows of a mountain of eternal snows, amidst groves of trees, reposes an old château—not for the first time introduced to these pages—and where, day after day, and week after week, day and night unceasing, we have listened, in days that are no more, to countless nightingales, ever pouring a flood of celestial music upon the air.

"What bird can it be?" said H. major. "It is a note I never heard before."

"And comes straight from paradise," said H. minor. "I don't think it belongs to earth at all, for I never heard anything so lovely. Is it a nightingale, padre mio?"

For full three minutes it poured forth its song, that nightingale, in the branches above us, its little brown body, its black sparkling eyes and pulsing throat in full view. Then it ceased, spread its wings, and flew away. We saw and heard it no more. A light had suddenly gone out.

"It must have come for our especial benefit. Don't you think so?" said H. major. "And how I wish it would come again!"

At this moment Madame Monroger appeared in the doorway, a very comely figure, a woman all gentleness and honesty.

"Monsieur est servi," she said, folding her hands and looking the perfection of a landlady.

"Do you often hear the nightingale?" we asked, not knowing that it was ever heard in the neighbourhood of Boulogne-sur-Mer.

"Mais oui, monsieur. It comes to us every spring, and makes our happiness. Lovely little brown creatures! They ought to be as sacred as the swallows—but they are not."

On our way upstairs we had to pass the kitchen. The door was wide open. Did equal sight ever before tempt youth? Chairs, tables, dresser—everything was covered with at least a hundred country cream tarts, large and small, into which tantalising plums were introduced at minute intervals: all waiting their turn for the oven.

"Oh!" said H. major, in tones Aladdin might have used when the garden opened to his astonished vision and disclosed the trees all hung with flashing jewels.

"Better than nightingales!" cried the other H., without even apologising for the sacrilegious sentiment.

What was to be done? Hearts are not adamantine; small indulgences are an agreeable variation to the wholesome use of the rod; indirect pleadings are more forcible than downright demands. Here were looks and interjections too eloquent to be resisted.

"Can you supplement our déjeuner?" was the inevitable consequence of that open door.

"I had not begun to bake," replied Madame Monroger. "They are all for to-morrow. We always have music here on a Sunday, and a great many people come from all the country round, and dine, and dance in the garden, and enjoy themselves.—And I am celebrated for my cream tarts," she added, with simple modesty.

"Can't the oven be seven times heated?" enquired H. major, anxiously.

"I will do my best," laughed Madame Monroger. "Fortunately it is quite ready.—De quel prix, monsieur?" she added. "You see the tarts are of all sizes."

"That is left to madame's discretion," we laughed. But the boys took the law into their own keeping, and measuring a yard of hands in diameter by three yards of large round eyes in circumference, Madame, with a quiet but expressive nod, which seemed to intimate that she perfectly comprehended; and before now had gauged the measure of a schoolboy's capacity; and was quite equal to the occasion; chose out the largest and most plum-strewn of the collection, and sent it into the very depths of her capacious oven. —Comprehended? The slowest and most simple savage would have gathered the meaning of those signs.

We were conducted by a willing attendant to a primitive room above, with sanded floor and a table partly covered with a white cloth. Everything was elementary, down to the knives that would not cut, and the two-pronged forks that were never made for ornament and scarcely for use, and the massive plates that might have been thrown out of window without fear of hurt. These windows looked on to the quiet street of Pont de Briques. A stream passed under the road, and a weir, opposite, kept up an incessant rush, with the sound of a miniature cascade. Beyond the river was the railway station, within a dozen yards of the hotel.

But if Madame Monroger's rooms were primitive, her cuisine was excellent. As for the simplicity, even roughness of our surroundings, what mattered? Variety is charming: and the two yards of bread brought like a beadle's staff into the room by the abigail —who rejoiced in the distinguished name of Sophronisbe—and placed triumphantly upon the table, created quite a diversion.

We had come up the river that morning from Boulogne in broad sunshine: had engaged a rowing boat at the steps of the inner basin, and a youth, not exactly of "lordly mien," or clothed in purple, but of willing ways and intelligent mind, to assist in the mysterious navigation of the stream. With sunshine and blue skies it is a very

pleasant row, this, all the way to Pont de Briques. The river winds so much that in the distance you see Boulogne now before you, and now behind you, now on the right hand, and now on the left, with its harbour and shipping, and its consumptive cathedral perched on the heights of the upper town. You pass between reaches of green meadows, backed, perhaps, by a wooded hill, or decorated with a maison de campagne, prim and stiff as they generally are in France: a train shoots past your very bow, with its human freight, and goes puffing on towards Paris or Boulogne, as it may chance; a factory, or iron works, will show up in all their prosiness, yet poetical by reason of their surroundings.

We had left E. at the Hôtel des Bains, arranging flowers which she had bought from the old woman in the Marché—for it was Saturday and market day.

"You will come with us," Auntie Nellie, said H. senior. "We cannot leave you behind."

"I think not, Harry," replied E. "I have not sufficient confidence in your powers of handling an oar, and should expect to be left at the bottom of the river."

"But I assure you," remonstrated H. junior, "that there is not the slightest danger. *We* will protect you"—magnificently. "And besides that, you could not drown a fly in that shallow river if you tried. I assure you, Auntie Nellie, if you tried to drown a fly in the river, you couldn't do it. You must really come with us."

"I am not a fly," laughed E. "But indeed I cannot come. "Once, my dear Hastings, when I was a little girl, not so big as you ——"

"Please, I am not a girl," loftily interrupts H.

"Nothing half so good," retorts E. modestly. "Well, then, when I was a little girl, without any reference to you as a boy, I went up a river with your grandpapa and Major Oliver. The Major understood nothing about rowing and nearly drowned us all. I have never quite recovered the terror of that day, and never quite liked rowing boats since then."

"And yet," protested H., "you constantly went out in the *Chip* last year. And at Southsea Regatta, didn't you steer her home, and win the race?"

"A very different matter," replied E. "The *Chip* is not a rowing boat, and I knew whom I had to do with. Captain Broadley was on board, and I felt safe. When *you*, my dear Hastings, command the *St. Vincent* and invite me to accompany you in the *Chip*, I shall accept with pleasure."

So E. remained behind and lost one of our very pleasantest days on French ground: that bright, sunny row upon the river, the nightingale's song and the apple blossoms, Madame Monroger's hospitable exertions and superb "tarte," and a very happy remembrance for many a time to come. There are days in our lives when nothing

very startling or important has occurred, and yet the hours have been so strangely pleasant, there has been such a glowing atmosphere over all, an indescribable charm has so surrounded us, that they are remembered for ever. The charm lies partly in a fortunate conjunction of circumstances, including perfect harmony and assimilation of companionship. It also lies very much in the Unexpected.

Half way on our journey we had passed a telegraph office on the banks of the river.

"Let us send a message to Aunt E.," cried H. major, "telling her that we are quite safe, and asking her to take the next train to Pont de Briques."

"That wouldn't bring her," said H. minor. "Isn't half stiff

PONT DE BRIQUES.

enough. Say that our boat has been round bottom upwards, and we want her to come at once and identify us."

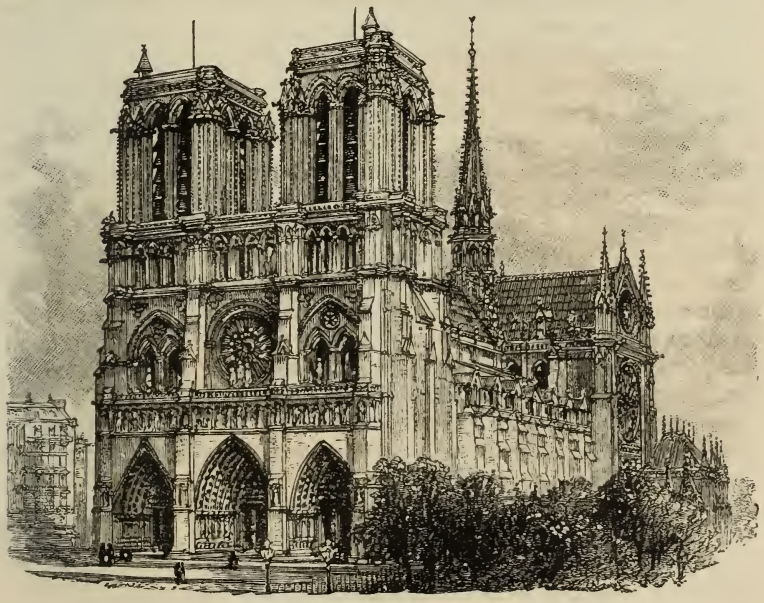
But the wires were allowed to rest in peace as far as we were concerned, and the boat shot on her way—bottom downwards. Towards Pont de Briques the river narrowed, and at last grew so shallow that a point was reached where there was nothing for it but to get out and walk over the rails: still piloted by our boatman, who, mooring his craft to the stump of an old tree, sprang up the banks with an energy that declared him as much at home on land as on water, and went far to prove his delight at paying his respects to Madame Monroger. The resources and excellence of her larder were evidently no new experience to him.

It all passed, that day: and there remains only a memory. A

remembrance of a nightingale's song, orchards blossom laden, floods of sunshine and white clouds floating over blue skies, and a perfect harmony: perfect happiness for a few hours in our little world of three; the world forgetting.

SECOND SCENE.

PARIS. The fair city of Paris, with all its life and gaiety and diminished charms. For Paris is not what it was. France never improves under a Republic—and with the dissolution of the Court of the Tuileries has disappeared a great part of the attraction and refinement of social life in Paris: that nameless atmosphere which



NOTRE DAME.

once made it the first city in Europe. Nous avons changé tout cela, the French may now say with a vengeance, and the change is for the worse. The very air of Paris seems vulgarised. The very waiters in the hotels meet you with an égalité, fraternité sort of manner, suggestive of the new order of thought and feeling.

But to lives too young to draw invidious or regretful comparisons, there is still a good deal to charm in the Paris of to-day. A constant scene of life and animation, everything and everyone apparently having one object in view—amusement. The very streets seeming to lead to that one end and aim, though the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli are ponderous and heavy, and the interminable corridors of the Palais Royal with their multiplied jewellers' shops, one so like another, grow hopelessly monotonous.

And even now, few places can equal Paris in early spring, when the trees are putting on their first fresh green, and skies are blue, and the sparkling air is laden with whisperings of the coming summer. This year, indeed, those spring days had more than a suspicion of summer about them: they were hotter than most of the summer days that succeeded.

So you declare as, one morning, you take steamer at the Pont Royal and go up the Seine to Sèvres. What a pleasant trip it is, you think. How the chief buildings stand out on either side. The Chambre des Députés, grave and solemn looking, as if it ought to be the abode of learning, devoted to the science of astronomy, research into metaphysics or philology, rather than the distracted assembly it too often is. The great building of les Invalides—that Chelsea Hospital of Paris—with its gilded dome flashing out in the sunlight, and almost painfully conspicuous from all points of the compass. The curious and Moorish-looking Trocadéro, with its slim, high towers, from which you obtain such a splendid coup-d'œil of the capital, and trace the windings of the Seine for miles, and mark out the boundaries of the Bois de Boulogne.

What life and movement there is upon the water as your boat flashes upwards. The man who takes your fare and gives you a ticket is a red-hot Republican, if not a Communist. By-and-by, when passing the ruins of St. Cloud—that favourite resort of the third Napoleon—you remark upon the sadness of its destruction. He turns fiercely, and almost seems inclined to hurl you into the waters; wishing loudly that kings and emperors, palaces and dynasties, were all drowned in the depths of the sea, so that the "people" might have it all their own way, and trample the "maudite aristocratie" —*i.e.*, everything that is respectable—under their feet.

Soon after this you reach Sèvres, and, with feelings almost of relief, part from this firebrand, still trembling with wrath and the violence of his emotions, and bid adieu to the steamer, which seems to go on her way surrounded by an atmosphere pregnant with dynamite.

You cross the green and pass through the great gates leading towards the factory. As the hour of admission has not struck, you wander under the grateful shade of the trees in the Park of St. Cloud, listen to their murmurings, watch the sunlight gleaming through them, the creeping shadows cast upon the ground athwart the avenue; watch the men at work in the fossés, and big French boys on the greensward playing as only big French boys can play—in a silly, effeminate sort of way, which makes you long to instil a little manliness and the mysteries of cricket into them.

When the hour sounds from a neighbouring clock, factory and show-room doors are thrown open, and you are admitted. The collection is well worth seeing, you think, but not the factory. Scarcely anything of the process is shown you, and what you do see is not interesting. In our English manufactories the whole process

rom beginning to end is traced, but at Sèvres it is otherwise. You see the various processes of making the paste, one or two hand mouldings, and there it ends. You come away and almost feel as if you had been imposed upon.

But the collection is another matter—a collection of both old and modern Sèvres; objects, as Mrs. Malaprop would say, of "bigotry and virtue," sufficient to make the unwary waver and the weak to fall. You breathe an atmosphere of beauty and refinement, and point out to the attendant a small, exquisite tea service of delicate green and gold. "Ah, monsieur!" he says, "vous faites un bon choix. C'est le grand prix de la collection."

After this, and before tempted to your own destruction—for many of these "things of beauty" are for sale—you leave the park and the factory behind you, and wandering to the very end of the one long, uninteresting street of Sèvres, come to a restaurant on the left-hand, where if they do not "loge à pied et à cheval," at least they dispense "à boire et à manger." There is such a homely air about it that you hesitate to enter, and peer through the windows with the desire of finding out if the interior is at least decent and in order. That peep decides the question, and you are lost. Madame, who seems watching for you as a spider for a fly, rushes forth and throws wide the door with effusion, and an "Entrez, entrez, messieurs! Vous êtes les bien venus!"

There is nothing else for it. You are a prisoner, and must hold out a flag of truce. Would that all prisoners fared as well on falling into the hands of the enemy. Madame's motto should be—"Excellent fare, wonderful cleanliness, moderate charges, and supreme civility." She pilots you to an upper room facing the street, with an opposite dull, dead wall, and noisy tramcars rushing to and fro between Paris and Versailles. Instinct leads you to investigate, and downstairs you find something better. A long, low room, a number of small tables spread with white cloths, and windows opening to a garden which in itself is a picture of beauty and repose—fruit-trees all blossom and flowers all scent. You have the room to yourself. The garden is in broad sunshine; you are in shade. It is all so quiet, so secluded from the world, the room is so primitive, the garden so primeval, that you feel in Arcadia. You have returned to the age of shepherds and shepherdesses. Here Phyllis and Corydon might live in bliss and repose. You compare it with the gorgeous grandeur of the Hôtel Continental where you happen to be staying, and declare a thousand times in favour of this rustic retreat.

But the trail of the serpent—le chat dans le coin—where is it? At this moment, as far as we are concerned, it is in the hands of the two boys, who bring forth toy pistols and paper caps, and when Eulalie, —they all rejoice in fine names, these maidens who cross our path— enters with three plates and a collection of pewter spoons, they fire simultaneously with a terrific explosion, which causes Eulalie to start,

drop her burden with a crash, and shriek out: "Madame! des Communards! Je suis percée de balles!"

Madame rushes to the attack. A woman of discernment, she at once seizes the situation, and with a nod and a smile, instead of giving the culprits in charge, abuses the victim. Thus is justice, for the most part, dealt out in this world! The plates are gathered up, and, nearly an inch in substance, are none the worse for their little adventure. We administer a word in season, but, too palpably got up for the occasion, it misses fire. The pistols are pocketed for the space of at least sixty seconds. We are deep in the politics of the hour and a paper offered to us by our thoughtful hostess; there is a great calm in the room after the late storm; we congratulate ourself on the perfect discipline and obedience of the two Hs. When bang! bang!—a double report from the garden, and the crack of doom; two cats' tails, erect and disappearing behind a distant wall; two boys in convulsions: who return to the room as they left it—by leaping over the window-sill.

Ah, well! it is the same old story over again. And we give a sigh to our lost youth, our days of delight in sham pistols, of laughter easily provoked, of care and sorrow unknown: days when that terrible Old Man of the Sea had not yet climbed our back, and established himself there for ever.

> "I remember the gleams and glooms that dart
> Across the schoolboy's brain,
> The song and the silence in the heart,
> That in part are prophecies and in part
> Are longings wild and vain!"

Lunch over, and Madame's very moderate bill paid, Madame herself sees you to the door—not for danger to her pewter spoons, but to do you honour in the plenitude of her hospitable heart. And as Madame sends after you a cheery "A la prochaine fois, Monsieur!" you quietly go your way to the river, and take boat to Suresnes, the next upward stage, stroll into the Bois de Boulogne, and contemplate artificial nature under the miniature rocks and waterfalls. Then, after a time, you retrace your steps, take a return boat to Paris, and once more enjoy the picturesque windings and changing scenes of the river. Altogether, it is a very pleasant way of spending a day; especially if you have to entertain boys who rejoice in freedom and sham pistols, and to whom the constant restraint of town without such interludes would soon grow irksome and monotonous.

Next morning, to vary the scene, you wander about Paris itself: stroll once again into the Louvre, with its galleries of treasures. Shall we ever forget one morning, years ago, quietly enjoying one of these rooms, when suddenly a great noise made itself heard: a distant murmur of feet and voices, which grew nearer and louder, like the rush and roar of a mighty army. What could it be?

Thoughts of a fresh revolution suggested themselves—for, living in Paris, one always feels as if living on the edge of a volcano. On it came, a mighty human tide, surging and swaying, and at length proved to be a party of Cook's excursionists "personally conducted." They never stopped, never seemed to look at the pictures, but moved steadily onwards, a living stream, clumsy feet and awkward movements resounding upon the parquets like a ceaseless shower of musketry.

To-day, if you chance to be with us, you will be spared the infliction. It is happy spring time, and the terrible tourist season is still in the far distance. But this morning it does not do to linger too long in the galleries. There is a time for everything, as there are the seven ages of man, and boyhood is not altogether the age for appreciating art treasures; for lingering over the pathos of a Murillo, the beauty of a Raphael, the devotion of a Correggio, the tone of a Rembrandt, or the gorgeous colouring and voluptuousness of a Rubens. So a few of the most noteworthy are examined and the rest are left for later years, if haply they may dawn.

You wander round to the Tuileries, and sigh as you gaze upon its ruined grandeur, where, in a wooden shed, the Post Office has found a temporary resting place. The very birds in the gardens: gardens once so beautiful and well kept: seem to feel the change, give a melancholy chirp to departed glory, and eat crumbs out of your hand as you go down the orange walk—some of those trees are said to be four hundred years old—with little twinkling eyes that seem to have acquired a heritage of sadness.

Passing round, you follow the banks of the noble river, calmly flowing to-day. But in its time it has run red with the blood of martyrs, and even now counts its unhappy victims by scores, who put a tragic end to their existence by plunging beneath its current, to reappear for identification in the ghastly Morgue. For life in Paris is frivolous, and therefore has its opposite, where extremes meet: every frivolous life has its tragic possibilities.

On the further bank are the tall houses one knows so well, crowded with the same tragic elements of life and suffering; innumerable domestic histories belonging to all sorts and conditions of men and women. How many, you wonder, would bear to have closets thrown open and skeletons laid bare? How many have *not* their skeleton-closet? How many of these existences would stand the scrutiny of daylight? On the other hand, how many quiet, unseen lives of devotion, of suffering in silence and secret, of religious fervour, that would not hesitate to accept the stake? How many unknown Joans of Arc—unknown even to themselves? This frivolous city, for all its wickedness and all its woe, teems, like all great cities, with unrecorded glories.

Beneath are the old booksellers' shops where you pick up treasures of learning and antiquity, ancient books and curious

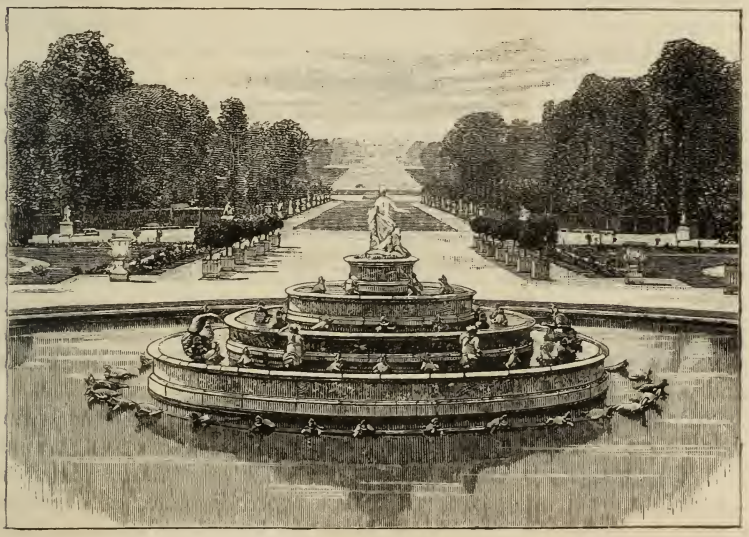
bindings; and there also are the old bric-à-brac magazins, crammed with things new and old, good and bad. But these matters and reflections are not interesting to boys, do not occur to them. More interesting is that noble pile we come to presently, Nôtre Dame: one of the most beautiful of gothic structures, yet less so than before its restoration. To-day a grand funeral is going on. The chancel is brilliant with lighted candles; priests with gorgeous vestments flit to and fro, and curtsey up and down, like ladies in a fashionable drawing-room; the organ sighs its melancholy strains through the solemn aisles and arches; that dark burden in the centre is about to be carried to its long home, and another soul has gone to its account.

Colonne de la Bastille.

Perhaps that last resting place is to be Père la Chaise, and you may take flight thither, passing on your way the Place de la Bastille, and noting the stones that mark the boundaries of that inquisitorial gaol, which the mob seized in 1789, and an Order of the National Assembly brought happily to the ground in 1790: at least one good action performed by an infuriated people. Ascending the narrow streets, lined on either side with melancholy shops displaying tombstones, and hideous wreaths and immortelles, and cheap black oval pictures on glass, you reach the great gates of Père la Chaise and toil up the avenues, and thank the guides for their offered escort, but decline their civilities. Here you may wander hour after hour, if so disposed, marking one grand tomb, one great name after another; trying to imagine the scene when, during the siege of 1870, five hundred wretched Communards were said to have been buried in one common grave; until you agree that it is the most mournful, most tiring place in the world, and almost envy the sleeping figures of Abelard and

Héloise, that, under their stone canopy, seem to repose so calmly after life's fitful fever.

Fly backwards for a moment over Paris; over the head of the Bastille Column—the Colonne de Juillet, with its outstretched figure of Mercury that they choose to call Liberty resting one foot upon the globe, bearing in one hand the torch of enlightenment, in the other the broken chains of slavery—over the Tour St. Jacques, beautiful with gothic ornamentation, and grey with the weight of three centuries of time; over the new Hôtel de Ville, taking care to drop the tribute of a tear at the ruin of the old, with all its lost beauty and charm. It is nothing but a recollection and a name, but its tradition is doubly kept alive by contrast with its successor.



VERSAILLES.

Pass over all this, over the broad flowing Seine, leaving Nôtre Dame to the left, with its towers, rich decoration, flying buttresses, and superb front; and guided by that small iron spire, light, straight and slender as an arrow, fold your wings and enter the Sainte Chapelle, that gem of thirteenth century Gothic art, small, but of such singular beauty, without rival in Paris or elsewhere; founded in the reign of St. Louis for the reception of the Crown of Thorns and other relics, since removed to Nôtre Dame. What a wonderful tone comes through those richly-stained windows with their exquisite tracery, some of the glasswork dating back six hundred years. How the dim religious light impresses mind and imagination. What a calmness falls upon the spirit. How you tread softly upon the pavement, dyed with a thousand hues by those matchless windows. What

a retreat from the garish day, the restless crowd, the noisy streets. You are in another world, "where all is pleasantness and all is peace." It has almost the beauty of an Alhambra, all the refinement of the gothic period, all the sanctity of a temple.

Once more take flight over Paris, but this time a wider flight, leaving the great city behind you, its very atmosphere, noise and crowd. Alight at the little town of Versailles; but passing over houses, streets, and the great square — where on a windy day the blast cuts you asunder and clouds of dust blind and suffocate you with a frightful persistence—fold your wings in the Park and Palace. You think how grand and magnificent it all is, how much more beautiful it might have been. The thousand million francs it cost Louis XIV., the thirty-six thousand workmen and six thousand horses employed in the work—surely they might have brought forth something better than this.

Yet it possesses a great charm, actual as well as historical. You may sit upon the terraces and listen to the famous band, le Géni, whilst you trace out its history from the days of le Grand Monarque to the downfall of the third Napoleon. You wander through the straight, stiff avenues, whose over-arching trees at least are beautiful in themselves, and defy the hottest midday sun. You watch the fountains playing and plashing, and perhaps wonder whether the sight is quite worth the ten thousand francs it costs for each exhibition. You stroll through the endless rooms, halls, corridors, and picture galleries, and give a passing wonder as to how it all looked when in 1870 it became the head-quarters of the King of Prussia, and was turned into a military hospital.

"But they did us no harm," says one of the old guides, who is conversational. "They did us no harm. They were quiet enough, and they respected the pictures. In this very place, Monsieur, I heard the old King of Prussia proclaimed Emperor of Germany. I thought then he was on his last legs, but I declare he's living still. Ah, well! our day of reckoning will come. We have only to wait for our revenge, and we shall get back Alsace and Lorraine, and al our lost honour."

Bidding farewell to this old guide, with his interesting re miniscences, you wander further afield into the Little Trianon, and muse over the palmy days of Madame du Barry, when beauty was everything, and morals were not too closely examined, and wealth rained from the splendour-loving King as manna from the skies. You may go yet further into the Grand Trianon, where you will sigh over the sad fortunes of thrice beautiful, thrice hapless Marie Antoinette, and marvel what manner of fiends dwelt in human form that could place such a head upon the block. Finally, you pass into that wonderful repository of gilded coaches and gala equipages, which altogether put to shame and ridicule the illustrious state chariot of my Lord Mayor of London.

And then you will be glad to return to anchor on the terraces of the great château, and contemplate the stiff avenues with their statues and vases, all in such perfect order that you wonder whether in autumn the leaves themselves are permitted to fall. You are on high ground, and the coup-d'œil is pleasant enough, and if the band happens to be playing, you feel that in itself is worth a flight from Paris.

To-day we three are almost alone, and as Satan finds mischief for idle hands, pistols are produced, and in alleys unseen paper caps are let off ad libitum. In a few minutes down comes a flying figure, armed with a stout wand of office and trembling with excitement—the brass-buttoned, full-uniformed guardian of these domains.

He stops before us with a low bow, and, it must be admitted, a deprecating manner.

"Monsieur, might I venture to request that the young gentlemen put up their pistols? I assure you the report is terrific, and since the war and the Commune, people—especially nervous ladies—have a great fear of the sound of firearms. It is not for myself"—with a polite shrug—"I assure you I am not afraid; I am not nervous; but it is for those who are."

Here, indeed, might Shakespeare cry Much ado about Nothing. All this peroration for toy pistols and paper caps, in grounds absolutely deserted. But the disturbers of the public peace and destroyers of weak nerves are recalled; pistols are banished to unseen pockets, where, no doubt, they are quickly burning a hole; Diogenes bows, excuses himself, and is about to withdraw.

"But what do you make of that noise below?" we ask, of a tremendous amount of firing that has been going on incessantly for the last hour, apparently within two hundred yards of us.

"Ah! monsieur, it is désolant, but the soldiers are practising and we cannot stop them."

"And the nervous ladies?"

"They suffer, monsieur, they suffer; but they know it is for the good of the country. Every sure marksman means death to a German—when the next war comes—and they would endure martyrdom in such a cause. Au plaisir, monsieur!"

Whether the plaisir is intended for the advent of another war, or a delicate compliment to ourselves seems uncertain; but the guardian having with such polite military tactics and without bloodshed raised this siege of Versailles, departs with full honours in a pompous procession of one, leaving us to make reflections on human nature.

Once more, and for the last time, spread your wings and fly back towards Paris; or if you are weary, borrow the magician's carpet and let it transport you through the air. Soar well above the world, and drink deep of the pure ether. Take in all the landmarks beneath you. The flowing, winding Seine, twisting about like a great silver snake;

the park of St. Cloud, the factory and town of Sèvres, which became almost a ruin under the unsparing hands of the Prussians as they bombarded it from Mont Valérien; the Bois de Boulogne; the great Babylon itself, restless, surging, mist-enshrouded. Steer for that gilded dome, which flashes out in the sunlight as if it would gather to itself all the warmth and glory of the sun. Pass through it, with the power of a disembodied spirit to whom material objects are no obstruction, and bars, bolts, and prison walls are drawn and raised in vain.

Alight on the pavement of the solemn church of les Invalides, and in an open circular crypt gaze down from above upon the tomb of the great Napoleon, who reposes here after life's storm and tempest. The round walls are polished granite; the massive sarcophagus, one block of brown granite weighing sixty-seven tons, was brought from Finland. You cannot touch it, but look down from a distance, as if it were too sacred for man's approach: an arrangement adding immensely to its effect. The solemnity, dignity, and silence which enwrap it could not well be exceeded. Compare it for a moment with the miserable monument in St. Paul's raised to the memory of Wellington. It is a majestic tomb, this of Napoleon, worthy of the great conqueror who lies there: one of the most imposing, most impressive sights of Paris. Before it you are silent with a thousand thoughts of wars and bloodshed, cruelties unsparing, energies superhuman, ambitions disappointed, marches conquering—and to be conquered! One day all the glories and powers of the world at command, the homage of kings and the obedience of popes—the next, a melancholy exile watching the clouds, tracing pictures in the fire, waking in despair from dreams that mock as phantoms of past realities; nothing left for hope but the dawn of a day when the brain shall cease to rack, and the body to suffer, and the accounts are closed.

Gazing upon the majestic grandeur of this tomb, such thoughts flash through the mind in quick succession, like the pictures of a phantasmagoria.

THIRD SCENE.

Guines. The Hotel du Lion d'Or, already introduced to these pages.* But where is Mdlle. Henriette, who on a previous occasion treated us in so lordly a manner: killing the fatted calf and making a charge ruinous to herself: spoiling two boys who, pillow-throwing in the early morning, had broken jugs and damaged carpets and otherwise turned the house out of windows: only to be called "pauvres chers anges," and treated to jam out of table spoons, and hot rolls and unlimited butter in their room, where they had been kept for "detention." "Je ne sais pas, monsieur,"

* December, 1882. "Across the Water."

said Mdlle. Henriette, in her loud but hearty tones, and in words that will not translate, "où vous trouvez la force de punir ces deux anges. Monsieur Henri c'est vous en miniature; monsieur Hastings, c'est vôtre tempérament en enfant.—Charge for broken jugs and spoilt carpets, smashed windows and demolished chairs! She would rather any day pay ten francs out of her own pocket for the pleasure of seeing such beautiful spirits. Let pillows fly up the chimneys and chairs out of the windows, she would scream at the fun and cry, Toujours gai, et vive la bagatelle!"

It was in vain to argue with Mdlle. Henriette: she evidently herself had been a very naughty child in her time, and all her sympathies in this direction had survived her youth.

But where is she to-day? Alas, not to be heard or seen. Mdlle. Henriette has retired from public life. The hotel knows her no more. "Mdlle. Henriette," says Malvina, later on, "has retired upon a fortune of twenty thousand francs a year, honourably gained: and proving, monsieur, that now, as ever since the foundation of the world, Honesty is the best policy."

This sad news throws a gloom over the quaint, very French Place of Guines, where weekly markets are held on a small scale, and farmers' wives and daughters compete with each other in the excellence and cheapness of their wares—a combination of qualities said to be impossible in all other parts of the world.

Without the welcome of Mdlle. Henriette's smile, the vivacious tones of her voice, made to command a regiment—I verily believe there was the stuff of a Joan of Arc in her—we have no desire to linger; and "the one voiture du pays," as she once wrote to us: a lumbering old landau, dating back to the days of the Grand Monarque, if not earlier: a heavy machine, which looks like nothing so much as a huge uncovered sarcophagus, and which rolls and pitches like a "gig" at sea—if we may be excused the jeu de mot: as this pride of the pays and eighth wonder of the world is in waiting, we all four embark—for Paris is over and E. has joined us—and bid farewell to Guines, its market place and the Lion d'Or. It is a long farewell; we shall not see it again. There is a loop-line now open to Landry, and a train returning to Calais in the afternoon will serve our purpose, and enable us to reach Boulogne at a reasonable hour.

The same flat old road as of old. Not a change in any landmark, nor an addition thereto. We are not in a country overrun with population. Houses do not struggle up by degrees into suburbs, to become in time—like our terrible Metropolis—towns without beginning or ending. The people of Guines and its neighbourhood go on in their quiet ways from generation to generation; births, marriages and deaths are the chief events which distinguish the rolling of the ages; nothing but the sundial marks the shifting of the hours; the four seasons alone point the year.

The driver occasionally whips up his horses, and they, poor beasts of burden, harnessed to this Egyptian sarcophagus, yet seem to think it no greater penance than following the plough, and trot on willingly enough. On either side the flat dull road, are flat dull fields, without even a hedgerow to break their monotony. In the distance the rising, hilly woods of Guines, where our tender childhood was once taken nutting by some older and very wicked boys, who, pretending to lose us, struck such terror to our juvenile heart that, to use an expressive French term, le sang bouleversé, we were *suffoqué*, and laid upon a sick bed for a whole week.

Presently, the little roadside altar, decorated as usual with tinsel and dead flowers and old rags—votive offerings from those who possibly have nothing better to give. And, remembering the widow's mite, who shall cast the first stone of reflection at these humble marks of religious fervour—and if a superstitious faith—yet still a faith?

Next comes Landry itself. Passing over the little white bridge and turning to the left, we see in the distance a little old woman leaning upon a stick, the impersonation of an old witch, but with a face and expression and kindly, intelligent eyes no witch ever yet possessed. Yes, it is certainly true; Joséphine has reached the age when people grow downwards very quickly; when the silver thread is loosening, and a far-off look in the eyes seems already to have caught a glimpse of that world whither the spirit is surely hastening.

She is watching, and it is said that a watched-for visitor never comes. But proverbs are not infallible any more than are those who made them. As usual she is attended by her court, who bow down to her, and are her willing servitors; her brother, still a hale old man, and her niece, Malvina, who has sacrificed years of lucrative serving to minister to her relative. Joséphine is still the oracle of the village, in virtue of having seen much of life, gone through a wide experience, become acquainted with foreign parts, ending her days in dignified independence.

The meeting need not be described. She leads the way into her cottage, which, like herself, looks as if it were kept in perpetual state, swept and garnished at painfully short intervals. A glance at Malvina brings forth the reply: "Ah oui, monsieur," with a laugh and a shake of her good-natured head; "tout tombe sur moi. C'est que ma tante est difficile, dà! Et ces messieurs—qu'ils sont grandis! On ne les reconnait plus."

"Ces messieurs" for the moment are being put through their facings by Joséphine, who, trembling with emotion, begins to realise that after all, the world will roll on in spite of her own retirement. Whereas she once looked down upon them, she now has to look upwards. She laments in spirit.

"If this sort of thing is capable of going on without me, it is

time I was laid aside," with a deep drawn breath. "It is very singular, but I don't quite see where I could have improved matters. Still all this is outward. Mademoiselle Ellen, are they well looked after? Is their wardrobe in perfect condition? everything placed to their hand? Every attention paid them in right of seniority?"

"Pretty well, considering," replies E. "But of course it was very different in our day, ma bonne, with you at the head of affairs. That does not happen in any family twice in a life-time."

With which adroit and not misplaced little compliment, Joséphine's fine brow clears, sunshine breaks over her good old face, and she abandons herself without reserve to the happiness of the moment. They are golden moments indeed to her, flying on mighty wings. For much has to be said; many recollections have to be gone over, and she has to devote some time to the mere fact of realizing that, once more assembled under one roof, the bliss of former days is renewed for a brief period. These infrequent visits are the red-letter days of her life; she broods over them, feeds upon their recollection, lives in anticipation; yet only quite realizes them when we have once more, as a flash of lightning in a summer sky, passed out of her sight and sound.

"Now, Malvina, for some fishing." This from the two Hs. And before long they have departed with lines and nets and all necessary paraphernalia, and make for a certain round pond, where eels come at your beck and call, and fine sport is to be had. Malvina feels her position. She carries the bait, and bears the bag destined to hold whatever fish may come to their nets. She also has the difficult task assigned her of restraining enthusiasm, and insisting upon a punctual return to the cottage, without which the afternoon train would be lost, and for the time being we should be houseless wanderers upon the face of the globe.

Who comes this way? No less a personage than Pascal, "le cousin," Joséphine's secretary and amanuensis, who has snatched half-an-hour from his work to come and souhaiter le bon jour, and have a chat upon his favourite topic, politics. He is singularly intelligent and clear-headed. But they are all a race to themselves in that respect, this clan, beginning with Joséphine herself. As for Pascal, the last time we met he mapped out the political situation of Europe: troubles that would arise with Egypt; complications of the Russian question; humiliations for England through mismanagement—all foretold with strange accuracy.

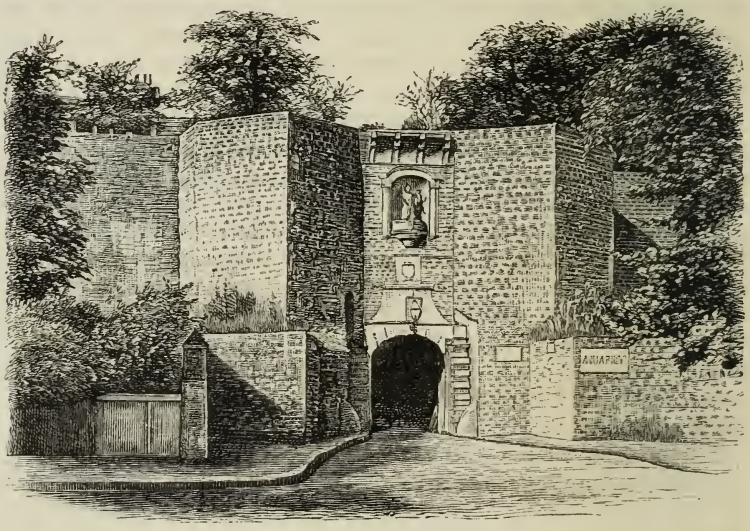
"Pascal," we said, "you are a wizard. You live here, out of the world, from one year to another, no one near you capable of sharing your thoughts and opinions—and you know more of the future of Europe than many of her statesmen."

"That is the very reason," replied Pascal, in his calm way, his great blue eyes, with so much width between them, full of intelligence. "I have no one to argue with: no opinions to hear on the other side:

I form my own impressions and—such as they are—keep to them. When I am following the plough, or sowing the seed (Pascal is a propriétaire and cultivates his own land), thoughts come into my head, and I seem to see what people will do and how things will turn out. I don't know chess, monsieur: I never saw it played: but I have heard that they who look on see more of the game than they who take part in it."

Yes, Pascal is a philosopher. He is out of place here; was intended for great things; is a village Hampden. Each time we see him this impression strengthens.

But the fishermen are returning: Malvina staggering under the weight and woe of her burden: much laughter and chatter waking



Boulogne Gate.

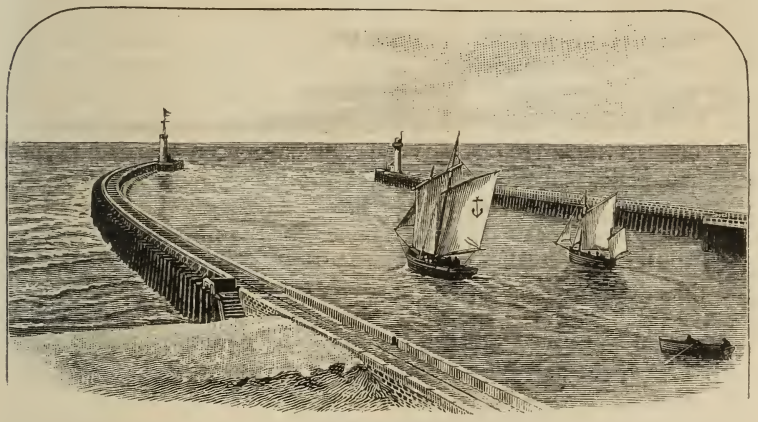
echoes in the solitary lane, where small, white cottages are dotted about at infrequent intervals, and the sound of the wooden hatchet is loud as it beats out the flax, and a scent of peat, issuing from open doorways, is in the air. This Landry is the cleanest and neatest village in the whole département of the Pas de Calais, and its people must needs be the most respectable. Each time in coming away we feel as if we had gone through some village pastoral or idyl, which has left behind it a tranquil melody. It has been a glimpse of another world; quite another world; strangely pleasant and soothing, as of an oasis where life passes without rush and roar, without wear and tear; where the steam whistle is an importation of to-day, and ordinary life goes on as it did a century or two ago.

To-day, when the fatal hour chimes, and last good-byes are over, and the inevitable question, "Quand vous reverrai-je, mes enfans?"

has received the oracular answer, "A la prochaine occasion, ma bonne," we turn slowly away, escorted by Malvina, to the railway station. One last look at that drooping figure in the road. She neither stirs nor waives; her eyes are fixed in melancholy. Then a bend in the lane takes us out of sight.

FOURTH SCENE.

BOULOGNE-SUR-MER. Pleasant Boulogne, with all its French life, gaiety and animation, splendid sea and sparkling air. What makes this difference between English and French ways, manners, and habits? Twenty miles of sea between us, but twenty thousand miles apart in tone and feeling, mind and impressions. We have our excellent virtues and solid qualities—a solidity occasionally allowed to run to seed; but the French, with all their lightness, ready wit and vivacity,



BON VOYAGE

possess the secret of passing their lives so that the hours of the day linger not. Anyone hipped from causes mental or physical, taking up his quarters at an English watering-place, will probably find the evil increase; it will not be the fault of his surroundings, animate or inanimate, if it improves. But let him repair to Boulogne or any other French sea-coast town, and if there is no quick recovery of health and spirits the case must be hopeless. We must, however, except Calais. Possessing the purest and best air in the world, its gloom amounts to a calamity, weighs you down as an incubus. It was wounded pride, not affection for the old place, that caused Queen Mary to utter those memorable words.

There is no place in Boulogne quite so distinctive as the Grand' Place at Calais; but, having said this, you have said all. Boulogne has its old gateways, its ramparts and fortifications, which make a

very pleasant walk on summer evenings. Boulogne is brim-full of life, and the old part of the town, devoted to the fishing population, is extremely quaint and characteristic. A very characteristic scene, too, when the fish-women assemble on the port in gay costumes, short petticoats, and long gold earrings and marvellously got-up caps; whilst, baskets on shoulders, these matelottes laugh and shout at each other and throw badinage, and display bare legs and feet that match so well their handsome faces.

Or you may find a crowd of them at the end of the pier, eagerly watching a boat going out to fish, it may be for weeks, or it may be only for hours. One of them, her sweetheart on board, with anxious, eager face is counting her beads and asking her favourite saint's protection. Her neighbour, whose days of sweet courtship are forgotten as much as the full honeymoon which ended them, has a husband going out. She is not counting her beads, or invoking special protection for the *Belle Marie;* but with a voice that was certainly made to match her trade, she throws them an "Au revoir" and a "Bon voyage," and for the sake of the pot-au-feu, hopes they will have "bonne chance." Then turning to her half-tearful companion: "Ne t'inquiète pas, ma mie," is her consolation. "Wind and sky in their favour, they will have a splendid time of it. I am one who believes in good omens—j'm'y connais moi, j'te dis. When you have been married twenty years, ma belle, you will learn to take life calmly, and look on the bright side of things.—Allons, mes filles!"

And away they go, their sabots, donned for the promenade, making a rythmical rise and fall upon the woodwork of the pier, keeping as good time and firm step as a company of soldiers.

"After all," says H. major, "this is better than Paris. We can breathe here. I would rather have this pier than the Rue de Rivoli, and the sands than all the Champs Elysées." A wholesome reflection with which we thoroughly agree.

It is Saturday and market day, and we go off to buy flowers and take a general look round. The flower-woman, whose complexion deepens year by year and matches her reddest roses, sees us from afar, and makes pantomimic signs to the effect that if we are faithless enough to go to any other flower stall than hers she shall die of a broken heart. But we are never faithless to old friends, and through the intricate mazes of stalls, and much pressed by holders to buy up all they possess, we reach the old woman. She immediately falls into attitudes, pays compliments all round, protests that Boulogne would cease to be Boulogne without our visits, makes button-holes "pour ces jeunes messieurs," who, of course, have changed out of all knowledge, presents Mademoiselle with a small bouquet, and finally sets apart of her best for despatchment to the hotel, invariably taking just half the amount of her primary demand. "Toujours à l'Hôtel des Bains, Mademoiselle? On y est si bien! Les mêmes appartements, n'est-ce-pas—No. 39. Ah! que je suis enchantée de vous voir! Pour

moi vous faites la pluie et le beau temps. Au plaisir, messieurs et dame!"

By degrees old landmarks are reconnoitred, old impressions renewed. We do not forget to pay our visit to Miss Osborne, who has not seen the outside of her convent walls for nearly half a century. A smiling Sister conducts us into the "Parloir de St. Joseph," with a closely-barred, closely-shuttered grating at the further end. Presently, a far-off closing of doors, far-off footsteps approaching, the shutters swing back, and Sœur Marie-Ursule, in nun's dress, pale, placid face and quiet, soothing voice, stands before us, accompanied by another Sister. The interview is interesting, yet melancholy, though the melancholy is on our side, not on hers. It comes of the thought of all those buried years, that retired life: the living death, as it were, of one who, graceful and accomplished above women, might have played her part in the world and made the happiness of those around her. The interview is at an end. E. puts her hand through the grating—it will admit none but a very small hand—and shakes hands with Sœur Marie-Ursule. We, not permitted a like privilege, are dismissed with a stately, old-fashioned courtesy, the shutters swing to, footsteps are heard receding into that living tomb, where, nevertheless, the nuns seem happy and contented. And we, too, depart.

Then comes one fine morning, when the two Hs., doing gymnastics, or practising the tight-rope, or performing something equally wonderful and out of place in their room, H. minor manages to sprain his neck in a very frightful manner. Half-faintings and sickness ensue, Dr. Walker has to be called in, looks serious and prescribes. "He will be all right in a few days," he says to us in an aside; "but a hair's breadth more and my services would have been of no use. Neither I nor anyone else could have done anything for him."

So H. has to go about like a sick monkey, with head turned forty-five degrees out of position. But looking on the bright side of things, he reflects that good comes out of evil, for in consequence of this accident we are detained in Boulogne beyond our time: and extra days, somehow, are often best days. By Saturday H. has recovered and the angle of forty-five degrees has disappeared. "There only remains the shock to the system," says Dr. Walker, who has been kindness and skill throughout; "and he must stay here until the very last moment for the sake of this wonderful climate." H. dances a hornpipe, which threatens to bring back all the mischief, and takes upon himself to plan the excursion up the river as far as Pont de Briques and Madame Monroger's. But, as we have seen, neither bribery nor persuasion can prevail upon E. to trust herself to their pilotage; and so we leave her at the hotel, decorating the salon with flowers, and prepared to spend a quiet and contemplative morning.

Our morning leads to enchanted regions: trees laden with blossom, branches whispering in the wind, a nightingale whose song still rings

in our ears as we write, the hospitable welcome of Madame Monroger, the indiscretion of cream tarts.—Upon so perfect a scene let the curtain fall and the visions fade.

Oh, youth! youth! Thine is the heritage ot the world, thine the task of moulding destinies, thine the privilege of seeing all things through rose-coloured glasses. It will pass away; therefore take of the good things God has given thee, and enjoy them to the uttermost. Yet remember, through all, to keep innocency in thine heart, and to do the thing which is right, for this, it is written, shall bring thee peace at thy latter end.

NIGHT.

From Victor Hugo.

A little child, beside me, fresh and fair,
In slumber so profound and calm you slept
You did not hear the doves that, murmuring there
In the deep shade, their tender vigil kept.
Pensive I breathed the sombre sweets of night—
The solemn night.

I heard the angels flutter round your head,
And watched your close-shut lids: pale primrose flowers,
With noiseless touch, upon your sheets I spread,
And prayed, with wet eyes, through the silent hours,
Thinking on all that in the darkness waits—
Lies hid and waits.

One day will be my turn so sound to sleep
That I, like you, shall hear no murmuring dove:
The night will be so dark, the rest so deep.
Then you will come, then you will come, my love,
And pay me back my gifts of fair white flowers—
Prayers, tears, and flowers.

C. E. Meetkerke.

A FORGOTTEN TRAGEDY.

By C. J. Langston.

I.

IT was the best of times. A worthy prince vaulted into the throne hurriedly vacated by the treacherous and bigoted James. Men breathed freely, for the nightmare of persecution seemed at an end. And they drank freely, too—12,400,000 barrels of home-brewed ale to 5,000,000 of people: whilst we, with 27,050 breweries and a population twice as large, consume 900,000,000 gallons yearly. "It was merry in the hall where beards wagged all."

London, alternately plundered, cajoled, psalm-smitten and bullied, was herself again, and could say, like the sun-dial, "Horas Serenas sed numero." The austerities of Windsor and the revelries of Whitehall were alike over, and reason had come to the rescue in the person of an honest but somewhat phlegmatic king. What matter that the country was on the eve of bankruptcy, that the plague of society known as the "seven barren years in the west of Europe," had just begun; that the threepenny loaf was rising to ninepence, and wheat to more than sixty shillings a quarter; that the agricultural wage was tenpence a day, and, perhaps as a consequence, every sixth person was a pauper?

What matter! in truly Roman fashion, though bread be scarce the games must be had; and London, representing the intelligent tenth of England and Wales, is all astir to behold young Mistress Anne Bracegirdle at the theatre in Covent Garden in a new character.

She is a lady of portly presence and dignified mien, who nobly holds her own amid an evil generation. With sufficient beauty to attract and render her a favourite in public, she exercises in private a certain coldness and hauteur which keeps fools at arms' length and makes the profligate beware. Woe to the thoughtless wretch who would presume to take a liberty with Mistress Anne: a hundred brawny arms would know the reason why; and yet Achilles has a vulnerable point, and did not the majestic Sarah of our grandfathers fall in love with a sorry young actor?

So was it with Mistress Bracegirdle two hundred years ago. Whilst looking down like moonlight upon the crowd of gouty peers, military roués, and scented dandies at her feet, she turned as a sun towards a humble actor, William Mountford, who had only an excellent disposition and character to recommend him, and to him she was, platonically speaking, all sweetness and light. Among the rejected suitors some took the matter with a pinch of snuff, philosophically;

> "What care I how fair she be
> If she be not fair for me?"

Others retired to neighbouring coffee houses and fired off explosive missives; and two of their number, Lord Mohun and his alter ego, Captain Richard Hill, proceeded to extremities.

Lord Mohun was a bright specimen of the fast man about town at the end of the seventeenth century. He would have been splendid as a brigand, or a sea captain, which was much the same thing; or in the war which ended five years later; being brave, dashing, and daring. But unfortunately he had a surfeit of what most men want—money and leisure, and that took him off in his prime; for, upon a trifling quarrel in 1714, he and the Duke of Hamilton fought in Hyde Park like Kilkenny cats, leaving no survivor.

His companion, Captain Hill, like Andrew Stoney Robinson of later history, was a villain to the back bone. A bully, and therefore a coward, he would have been prime minister in that Government of Mohocks which, in 1712, was the terror of London by night; and which found diversion in flattening the noses of solitary servants, rolling defenceless females in barrels down Constitution Hill, and making peaceful citizens caper with sword-thrusts until they dropped fainting in the gutter.

These two worthies were drinking heavily at The Horse tavern in Drury Lane, when Lord Mohun exclaimed:

"Split me, Hill, if I am not ready to carry her off."

"I am resolved to have the blood of Mountford," replied Hill.

"Be not so sure," said his lordship. "Mountford is good at fence: he has been waylaid."

"Never stir alive," answered Hill, "if I am not on him at once, and if the villain dares to resist, I will stab him like a dog."

Mistress Bracegirdle, all innocent of harm, is preparing for the evening performance. Her humble attendant, Elizabeth Walter, has patched and powdered and rouged her mistress like unto *Mrs. Oldfield*—"And, Betty, give this cheek a little red." The toilet is completed, but where is her knight-errant, Will Mountford.

There is an unusual crowd in Howard Street, and people are hurrying along the Strand; and flaming links light up ghastly faces; and amid the hum of voices a woman shrieks and falls: and the watch are bearing the manly form of Mountford to Mr. Bancroft, the chyrurgeon. He is still alive, but life is ebbing fast, and he hastens to tell of the encounter. "'Your servant, Mr. Mountford,' said Lord Mohun, embracing me, and pressing me against the wall. Then Captain Hill, he strikes me on the ear, and being in a manner pinioned by his lordship, I was repeatedly stabbed without further words; for Hill was in and through me before my sword was out."

Meanwhile the murderer, throwing away his sword, hurries down Surrey Street, and reaches the purlieus of the Thames, where few dare follow him: and Mohun, half mad with liquor, defies the angry crowd, shouting, "I am glad Hill is not taken, and I don't care a

farthing if I am hanged for him, but I wish he had some of these counters of mine, for I fear he will be in a sorry plight."

Young Mistress Anne Bracegirdle heard of poor Will Mountford's death with much the same composure as the Russian Empress Catherine received tidings of the departure of her forty-first favourite; or the Lady Jane, of Tapton Hall, of the fishy metamorphosis of good Sir Thomas. It was not the age of fine feeling, and like the sedate Sarah Siddons, the charming actress, Anne, may have put her tears into a bottle for stage purposes, although she sent her maid to purchase a copy of the tragedy being wailed down the street to the usual refrain of "Now ponder well, you parents dear." Besides, did not great Anna herself, with admirable fortitude, eat three hearty meals on that mild October day, when her dear hubby was no more?

Follow, still follow, and in this strange, eventful history, I will show you, as far as I am able to trace, that the murderer still bears the brand, and is cursed with the restless solitude of Cain. London awakes to a sense of the crime, the hue and cry is fierce, and Captain Hill, fearing betrayal, flies from the rotten houses near the river into the open country. He is sober enough now, and changing his steinkirk neckcloth, red waistcoat, and laced coat for the dress of a drover, he avoids the main roads, and tramps stealthily to the midlands. How he maintains himself and fills an empty purse is scarcely known, but he is more than suspected of "collecting rents on the road;" being recognised by an acquaintance when he stopped the Lichfield stage coach.

But ill-gotten gains melt into thin air, and even then the calling of Claude Duval was apt to end in a noose and a ride upon nothing. At length he reaches a weird, lonely habitation, still known as Moon's Moat.

Twelve miles south of the great centre of industry, Birmingham, and two miles east of Redditch, in the parish of Beoley, we come upon the "ghoul-haunted woodland"—Moon's Moat. Surely never spot was more suited for mystery and murder, never spot seems more haunted by the sad memories of the past. The very air is oppressive, as if weighted with woe; and when great winds sweep down the vale of the Arrow, they pause as if affrighted, in the near hand trees, and dare scarcely murmur in the decaying alders lest they awake the unshrouded dead.

The stagnant moat, dark and glassy as the eyes of her, the beauteous Mariolle, whose beauty proved no armour against fate, is full of slimy creeping things, with here and there a knotted trunk, gaunt and hoary, brooding over the dark water like some Sylvan Isis, the guardian of the dead. The embowered enclosure, seventy feet square, wherein the "moated grange" once stood, is striking in its desolation. Ash trees have sprung up, matured, and thrown down their arms with thundering sound since the house was dismantled, one hundred and

fifty years ago. Patches of herbage appear rank and rotten, but nothing seems to thrive on that spot once sown with the salt of unavailing tears, and polluted with the blood of the slain. No bird sings; no sound breaks the awful silence. So near, and yet so far from human sight and sympathy, it would seem like a place

> "Where no man comes, or hath been
> Since the making of the world."

And yet the sounds of song and revelry once rose from this dark, lonely spot. Here groups of merry children played. Here were the varied scenes attending the birth, the bridal, and the burial; and now not one stone left upon another. Like Charles Lamb's lament over the mansion of Blakesmoor, "I had a vague notion that it could not all have perished, that so much solidity with magnificence could not have been crushed all at once into the mere dust and rubbish which I found it."

I know well that Moon's Moat has been the quarry for the repair of neighbouring buildings and roads for generations; but methought there would be some indication of its walls, some foundations to show where hall and tower and oratory stood, for the Moons were ever rigid Romanists; from the knight whose lady still walks beneath the trees on the Eve of St. Agnes to the last of a lordly line who was borne with a crucifix on her breast to Beoley churchyard during the middle of last century.

In the registers the name is variously spelt Moon, Mann and Mane; and being humble relatives of Lord Mohun was the reason probably why a traveller answering to the description of Captain Richard Hill came to the Moat and claimed a welcome in the winter of 1692–3; although with the tragedy that followed I am not able clearly to associate him.

It seems that the fortunes of the Moon family were already on the decline. The house had been dismantled and despoiled by the Parliamentary forces fifty years before, and was then occupied by Joan Moon, widow, her three sons, and their half sister Mariolle, and two old servants, Mark Wheeler and Elizabeth Baggot. Tradition says that a foreign soldier (Hill had served abroad) desired to woo the young lady, and failed to win her regard. He persisted so urgently and craftily that the brothers, who should have been Mariolle's best men, were arrayed against her.

On the 14th of January Thomas Gale, Constable of Beoley, deposeth that "he was crossing the neighbouring pasture on his way to the Holt End when he was amazed by hearing shrill cries from the Moat House, 'Save me, save me, have ye no pity!' as of a woman being murthered. Which cries continuing and waxing louder I turned to the place, and was well nigh at the drawbridge, when there fell or bounded, for soe it seamed, from the leads a living body into the water; at which there was silence for a while, but presently I

heard overhead men's voices muttering and reviling. Feeling assured that a foul deed had been done, and liking not the character of the young masters, I hastened to the village to awaken John Greene and William Bayliss, whose musquots had been left at Henley, so that it was break of day before we could demand entrance in the king's name. Old Mark Wheeler shewed us the chambers, and was that mithered with Christmas ale, we could make nothing on him, but stood swaying his head and fooling like a morris dancer, whilst Mr. William Moon made oath that no such circumstance could be, inasmuch as his sister Mariolle and the others were away in London with Squire Sheldon. Mistress Moon looked scared, though she said nothing. Whereupon, as our duty was, we made diligent quest, and prodded with our staves divers parts of the water without finding aught save a cloak of serge; and yet I verily believe that a wicked deed was done on that night, for Miss Mariolle no more appeared amongst us."

I may add that the suspected tragedy doubtless gave rise to the prophecy which a very old parishioner remembers:—

"When in Moon's dark stagnant moat
Fetter'd hands are seen to float;
When from tangled rushes nigh
Thrice is heard a piercing cry;
When the night winds, whisp'ring, wave
Grasses rank o'er shallow grave,
Life shall cease in court and hall,
Drawbridge rot and roof-tree fall,
Till the tale from pallid lips
Is rehearsed of Moon's eclipse."

It certainly seems strange that its owners became poorer and poorer; the lands were sold, the mansion suffered to decay, until, in 1737, the ancient family of Moon was represented in this deserted house by a solitary half-witted widow, whose poverty and disposition are enshrined in the following rustic rhyme, still repeated:—

"Milk and water sold I ever,
Weight and measure made I never."

II.

Captain Richard Hill hears that efforts are being made to smooth the way for his return to town. The father of Mrs. Mountford, Mr. Percival, has got into a mess, having, according to one account, been found guilty of "clipping," but the generally received opinion is that he was concerned in the nefarious plot to assassinate King William. At any rate Hill's powerful friends join in a successful intercession to the Queen, and Percival is pardoned on condition that the widow Mountford shall cease her efforts to bring her husband's murderer to

justice. But in London "there is no room of safety for Octavius yet," and the villain of the piece has still to wander uneasily up and down the world's stage, with the worm of conscience gnawing at his heart. Within eight miles of Moon's Moat is Alcester, where he boldly rides up to the chief posting-house, The Angel, and receives sundry letters addressed to him as Captain Richards; and it is by two of these letters, now tattered and blurred, that I connect him with the startling scenes which follow.

Captain Richards was a handsome fellow, in spite of a deep scar on his cheek, and particularly taking with strangers by reason of the genial abandon of his manners and conversation; but how he became intimate with the sedate townsfolk of Alcester, and was included in the invitation to a kind of housewarming I cannot imagine.

But so it was. The heir to the old family of Pumphrey had recently improved the quaint dwelling still standing near the town-hall by the addition of an upper room of handsome proportions and ornamentation. The minutely carved woodwork is beautiful in older parts of the house, but this room is especially noticeable from association. The dark, heavily-moulded panels, with a border of white, the stately folding-doors, the deeply-cut cornice, enriched with cornucopiæ, scattering fruits and flowers of tempting fulness; the lofty ceiling, with its oval centre-piece bordered by the mystic letters L E T, and the date 1688; reminding us that well nigh two hundred years have rushed past with noiseless wings since first the polished floor gave back the sound of nimble feet, and friends and neighbours met together to rejoice that "a bloodless revolution saved the land."

Very jovial was that party in January, 1693, at which Captain Richards was present. The gentlemen, in their laced coats, velvet breeches, and faultless furbelows; the ladies in braided bodices, high heeled shoes and ample skirts, shortly to be developed into the hooped petticoats. Each gentleman upon entering made a low bow, then saluted the ladies all round; and Captain Richards led off one of the fairest in the noted dance, Moll Patley, after which followed the more stately minuet and rigadoon.

But the Captain soon slipt into the adjoining room, where whisk and lauctre loo were in full force, and where he was soon roused to anger by being likened to the knave of clubs. Inflamed with passion and wine, he drew his sword, but was overpowered and put outside the door, when he retired to The Angel Inn opposite, vowing vengeance.

The Angel has for centuries been identified with the ancient town of Alcester; for this was the hostelry which, under the especial protection of the church, received the overflow of visitors to the various monastic buildings near, when such came to worship at the shrine of St. Faith. And although the original has long disappeared, there are parts of the present house which may have been in existence when Baxter was prophesying "lamentation and mourning and

woe" under the adjacent town-hall, while the cannon at Edge Hill thundered its interpretation of the text.

To The Angel the Captain retired, the scar on his left cheek reddened like the brand of a felon, with the glow of a fierce fire which he had kindled, and he did not retire to rest; but whether he wrought the vengeance over which he pondered, or suffered in the attempt to inflict suffering upon others, I can only infer from the extraordinary and mysterious circumstances which have come under my observation, and which have caused so great a sensation in the neighbourhood.

Of Captain Richards, alias Captain Richard Hill presumably, in the habit in which he lived I may have much to say; but of the same mortal of flesh and blood who was supposed to have left The Angel in February, 1693, I know nothing further than by conjecture. I say *supposed* to have left, for unless I can be more fully informed, I am strongly inclined to believe that the remains of this persona ingrata still moulder in our midst.

Probably about this time The Angel became known as the haunted inn, but not until many years afterwards—namely, 1820—do I discover any reason for the belief.

The landlady then was Mistress Hancock, a shrewd, strong-minded woman, well fitted for her position, and not likely to be led away by idle fancies. A chambermaid named Clarson seems to have been repeatedly frightened during the dark hours, and was attended by a surgeon living just above, for hysteria; and shortly afterwards becoming worse, left. Her successor saw and heard nothing, so that Mrs. Hancock was well pleased to give out that the whole thing was a delusion, or, as she described it, "a parcel of nonsense."

Time passed, leading that generation into the land of shadows, and with the exception of an occasional reference to the old traditions by the habitués of the smoking-room, and the unconquerable aversion of the servants to be left alone in the dark, nothing occurred to identify the gloomy rooms with ghostly visitants.

A discovery was made, however, in 1837, somewhat suggestive. A large oven, closed, and bricked up many years ago when a kitchen was converted into a sitting-room, was found to contain a rough oblong box, with an anchor burnt in the lid and two swords crossed beneath. Inside were the tarnished trappings of what had once been a loose military cloak, or roquelaure, together with a low-crowned felt hat, with broad brim once turned up at the sides, and ornamented with feathers; small shoe buckles, yellow vest, woven with gold, an empty snuff-box, smelling strongly of bergamot, and two almost illegible letters relating to a loan, one of them signed P. or R. Macartney, and the other written in French, F. Vandille; both being addressed "Captain Richards, to be left with Mr. Butler, Aulcester, Warwick."

The discovery of these remnants of forgotten frivolity had well-nigh passed into oblivion when a family occupying part of The Angel Inn,

recently turned into a private house, were astounded by such strange manifestations as left no room for doubt that the place was haunted. It may be that, as a cannon fired over the water brings the body to the surface, so the noise and vibration of the workmen in altering the house loosed some sombre spirit from its moorings, and gave increased activity to its midnight wandering.

"My husband and I were in bed," said my informant, a lady well known in Alcester, "when it seemed as if a heavy body had suddenly fallen against the door, straining the panels, and causing the framework to shake and rattle. He at once got up, thinking an invalid lady in an adjoining room was seeking help, but there was nothing. Carefully closing the door, he retired. Again the same vehement pressure and rattling, and this was repeated at intervals.

"I was now thoroughly roused," said she, "and waited, with awful trembling and chilliness at the heart, the dénouement. With no further noise, but with the fitful fervour of a gust of wind, the door opened to its full extent, and I became conscious that some *thing* had entered. Some *thing*, I say, for we had no light, and were really too unnerved to find one. And yet how can I describe my tremor and my agony, as I lay helpless and motionless, wildly staring into vacancy, expecting every moment to be in the grasp of a power not revealed? That power betrayed its presence. I distinctly heard some brass handles to the chest of drawers click against the woodwork as if a body brushed by. It was coming nearer, for the wardrobe, which leant forward on the uneven floor, was thrust back against the wall; nearer still, when the chair by the bedside rocked violently. And now overhead, following the rustle of the drapery, came the only sound we heard: a hissing sound, as of one breathing heavily; and then a low, mocking 'ha-ha!' enough to curdle the blood in one's veins; after which there was a heavy thud against the cupboard door, exactly over the long-concealed oven, and we were left alone."

The invalid occupant of the adjoining room, who is rather deaf, had been so often and so strangely alarmed that she always used a night-light. She was forcibly made aware that

> "The spirit world around this world of ours
> Floats like an atmosphere, and everywhere
> Wafts thro' these earthly mists and vapours dense
> A vital breath of more ethereal air."

Upon retiring one evening the chamber door, usually on the jar, closed at her approach, neither could it be opened without assistance; and during the effort to open it, the impression was exactly as if a powerful body pressed from within, causing a constant jarring of the upper part of the door against the lintel. The lady has also been repeatedly disturbed by what she deemed a faint sibilation overhead, and in the dim light she has twice seen what she describes as a tremulous mist, oval in shape, gliding along the room until it faded in

the recess to the right of the fireplace. Wherever it paused the furniture near shook and rattled.

Perhaps the most startling phenomena was observable on that evening when she entered the room hastily and took an ordinary cane chair at the foot of the bed. When sitting down she was conscious of pressing upon something which yielded like an air cushion with a sound as of a heavy sigh, and immediately the body, or what it was, seemed to re-form, and brush past like wings so abruptly that the candle was blown out, and she regained the sitting-room, feeling, as she says, more dead than alive.

But the apparition (for I no longer hesitate thus to call it) assumed a more definite shape outside the building. Between that and the adjoining house is a long, wedge-like, cul-de-sac, formed by the acute angles of outer walls. Here daylight never enters, and one feels—

> "A silence and a stirless breath
> That neither is of life nor death."

Here, in December, 1825, a servant-girl, throwing down a peck of oyster-shells after supper, was so affrighted by a man in armour that she fainted right away; and here also, during the past year, has been seen, bending over a heap of rubbish at the further end, a tall figure dressed in a habit unknown to living men.

It may be readily imagined that appearances and disturbances so startling, and authenticated beyond all manner of doubt, became the talk, not only of our tea-table coterie, but of the whole town, and everybody was asking, "Is there anything fresh?" To one, therefore, like myself, who has made the subject of apparitions an especial study during many years, and who puts all evidence of the supernatural into the crucible of analysis, the opportunity seemed favourable for testing a peculiar theory.

There is something very natural in the ardent wish of many who have left this earthly stage just to lift the trap-door, and when the theatre is deserted, and "all the breathers of this world are still," to gaze in the twilight upon the scene of past triumphs and trials. And I may add, after the fullest scrutiny and enquiry, I verily believe that two instances, at least, of apparitions—namely, that seen by the Wesleys in their retired parsonage, and the one relating to the death of the wicked Lord Lyttelton—are as well authenticated as anything ever recorded of the supernatural.

It may be noticed that, generally speaking, only those who have met with sudden or violent deaths, or who have been strikingly wicked, are said to reappear. May not this be owing to the former being transfixed by a certain strong earth-life at the moment of death, and the latter being impelled earthwards by the gravitation of gross minds towards the centre of their wickedness. If it be true that—

> "Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth,
> Unseen both when we wake and when we sleep,"

I can only account for their infrequent appearance by supposing that, as the old Greeks were colour blind, we are insensible to the volatile ether in which such spirits are clothed.

Then again, not only is darkness usually needed to bring out the spectral image, but, like mesmerism or other occult science, a sympathetic subject is a sine quâ non.

Such I doubt not was my informant. Listening to her account of the above appearances—so strange, so weird, so thrilling—I involuntarily shuddered and shivered, as if the spectre passed before me, and I heard the hiss of its mocking laugh. Surely some supersensitiveness to other world influence, some spiritual affinity otherwise than of character, enabled her to behold this wanderer from the vast unseen cycles of existence, who has been ever struggling to break the eternal silence and to breathe his guilt to humankind.

The house soon became empty ; I need hardly say why ; and when going over it, I noticed that a window fairly near the ground remained unfastened, and I determined to brave the horrors of a night spent alone in a haunted house.

Wednesday, the 26th of March, 1884, a cold, dark night, was the time chosen ; and I had no difficulty in entering without observation the front room, about sixteen feet square, which in the good old coaching days was reserved for travellers. In the corner was the highly polished Queen Anne fireplace, round which the fresh arrivals would gather and tell of hair-breadth escapes on the road, and what was doing in great London town ; but the cracked and bleared picture on a panel over it, which excited my curiosity when a child, was gone. Passing up the dark oaken staircase, with its quaintly-carved balustrades, to the first floor, I took my station in a bedroom dimly lighted by two narrow windows with heavy mullions ; the glass yellow with age. I was not quite alone, an old and faithful dog being by my side. As I lay on the rug and air cushion which I had brought, softly and slowly, not to awaken the long sleepers, each under a green coverlet below, the old church clock tolled the hour of midnight. Thus gently has it spoken to the listening town for nearly two hundred and fifty years ; thus will it speak, reader, when you and I are among the shadows which we so fear.

To say that I had heard nothing would be a mistake. It seems a way with these old houses to keep a discreet silence during daylight, and then at night, when nobody can contradict, to give full vent to their creaks and strains, and unaccountable protests against humanity. When one stair begins to complain of undue pressure, another must snappishly follow its leader ; when one door bangs with a booming sound, its cousin, fifty feet removed, must exclaim, "That's nothing ; hear my bang ;" and when a huge chimney mutters and shakes its sooty sides on to the floor, in the effort to make a clean breast of it, the rusty vane on a cowl afar off must give a

responsive shriek, as it turns to all points of the compass for sympathy.

So mysterious were these noises that twice I groped my way to the attics, and, throwing back a square lid, listened to the revelry of the rats in the roof. Holding somewhat to the theory that the power of the will can exercise a magnetic influence upon the person thought of, I concentrated my thoughts upon him whom I deemed the apparition to represent, and so thinking must have dozed. I certainly was not prepared for what follows, and has caused so much excitement in our social circle, that, to prevent further exaggeration, I hasten to repeat it.

Shortly after one o'clock, when in that passive state between sleeping and waking, I was startled by a low prolonged growl from my dog. Dimly conscious of a faint, luminous centre, reason for a moment associated it with a night-light in my own room; then came reflection, and remembering where I was, I felt as in a nightmare, tongue-tied from fright. Almost immediately there came a sound which I can never forget; beginning like the wintry wind passing through the withered leaves of an oak, it ended in a series of short guttural sounds which might be taken for a mocking laugh.

It is said that sudden fear paralyses the senses, otherwise how could I gaze without horror at the scene before me? There, with a kind of amber phosphorescence, revealing the outline, stood, or rather floated, the image of a man. A long cloak of dark material, and rough, large boots were all that appeared of the figure: but the face—ah, the face even now comes back to me with terrible distinctness. The hair had been closely cropped and the face was ghastly pale, but a streak, red as vermilion, gave a hideous grotesqueness to the left cheek. The eyes, which were large and luminous, followed me with what seemed beseeching earnestness; but what was that over the mouth? Had Burke and Hare been anticipated in their fiendish practice? Had the murderer himself fallen a victim? I now understood the cause of the peculiar hissing sound I had heard, and I shuddered.

Even then I thought my senses were weaving strange fancies in the brain; but one glance at my dog was sufficient. His eyes gleamed like fire, his body quivered with emotion, and with half a moan, half a cry, he crouched and pressed against me, fixedly staring as if fascinated by the spectre. No further confirmation was needed.

With an impulse that was madness; with a daring begotten by the continual consciousness that we are such stuff as dreams are made of; I moved towards the apparition, and actually touched with outspread hand the wall immediately behind it.

But here comes the amazing fact. I was yet conscious of passing through an impalpable presence. The sharp sound and the repulsion threw me back, and then I saw the spectre reform: but now it seemed strangely agitated, passing hither and thither with restless eagerness, and causing a current of air as if fanned by invisible

wings ; and still at intervals the same heavy spasmodic breathing, more appalling than aught else. At length I managed to articulate : "Are you Captain Richard Hill?" The breathing ceased and the spectre was stationary.

"Are you at rest ; and what do you want?"

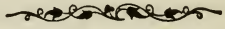
The features were strangely contorted, and the eyes shone as balls of fire : whilst a low hiss, as of a serpent disturbed in its lair, was all the response.

"I fear to ask, but can you—*will* you speak?"

At this entreaty there was plainly a convulsive effort ; the face seemed to expand, a gurgling sound like a stifled cry followed. For the first time I saw a small hand, delicate as that of a woman, raised to the mouth, and then I was alone.

This I knew at once by my dog. He rose, shook himself and caressed me, as much as to say, "Master, the danger is over."

I came away as one in wonderland. The adventure became known. People yearn to hear further particulars, but I can only give without comment this startling narrative of facts.



GOOD-BYE!

SET the door open wide into the night,
Where the stars burn, sharp points of frosty light.
One that we know is bound afar, alone,
Into a distant land beyond our sight.
He came to us a child of gladsome spring,
A lusty youth in summer's garlanding,
And, with the ripening corn to manhood grown,
He toiled with us thro' autumn's harvesting.

Now all the golden fields lie plucked and bare,
The thin woods shiver in the winter air ;
'Tis not a night to quit warm fire and friend—
Yet he must go and leave an empty chair!
Our talk runs high, with many a jest and song,
But still an undertone does laughter wrong ;
Those laugh the best whose laugh is for the end—
And well we know that tears must come ere long.

Into a distant land beyond our ken,
Whither have passed the hopes of many men,
Fresh springs, full summers, autumn's garnered store ;
Whence come no signs of life or love again :
He too must go ! in vain we close him round,
Nor yet may follow whither he is bound :
We stand alone beside the open door—
And the toll'd church bell gives no further sound!

G. B. STUART.

HOW IT CAME THERE.

Founded on Fact.

By Constance McEwen.

"NOW you will come into my own little workshop, and then you will have got over all the sight-seeing," said Captain Featherstonhaugh, bending tenderly towards the lady at his side. "Preliminaries are very fatiguing, I know, to *our sort*," he went on humorously. "Introductions to sisters, aunts and cousins, and all the 'sugar' and 'salt' that accompanies an engagement; beginning with a kiss from aunt Miriam, and ending with a present from the housekeeper. Still we are getting on very well, you must allow. You have been here just—let me see." And Captain Featherstonhaugh took out his watch and looked at the time. "Just two hours. In that compass you have been stared up and down by the Mater, Pater, and future sisters-in-law, and come through it all like a statue. Even aunt Miriam's kiss didn't melt you."

"I'm very odd, I know," laughed Miss Boscowitch, tossing aside the white Russian furs which enveloped her. "I want a new sensation. I read people off like story books, and it's always the same story. The only difference is in the binding."

"I very well like the binding of *this* book," said Captain Featherstonhaugh, still more tenderly.

"Pretty speeches," said Miss Boscowitch, looking rather absently out of the window, "never mean very much."

"How cold you are!" said Captain Featherstonhaugh. "One would think that you had had some absorbing attachment before—only I know that to be impossible."

"Why impossible?" said Miss Boscowitch, throwing herself into an American rocking-chair, and lazily setting it in motion.

"Because you would have told me," said he, humbly. "I should have liked you all the better for it."

Miss Boscowitch made no reply, but turned a large emerald ring, which graced the third finger of her left hand, rather uncomfortably round and round.

The man who stood before her was the most desirable of men, and up to the moment of entering that workshop—as he chose to call the long, low, luxuriously-furnished room, which was appropriated to him at Steppe Castle—she had believed that the dreams of other days had glided out of memory's reach. What vibration from the wing of Destiny had touched her *now*? What mystic chord had the last few minutes spent in this room set in motion?

They had met at the house of a mutual friend that summer; the mutual friend being, in this instance, one of those unselfish indi-

viduals called matchmakers, aiding and abetting the promotion of others' happiness with a hearty satisfaction. And it was while Donald, the champion dancer at the Blair Athole games, was executing a series of bewildering steps, that Captain Featherstonhaugh had assured Miss Boscowitch of his devotion, and been assured in his turn of its acceptance. And now she had come to stay at the romantic castle of Steppe, in Perthshire, to be introduced to the family of the man whom she was about to marry.

"Did you ever care for anybody before?" said Captain Featherstonhaugh, still humbly.

"Did you?" said Miss Boscowitch, with a sudden flash of gaiety.

"You are evading the question," said Captain Featherstonhaugh.

"My dear Hugh," said Miss Boscowitch, laying a very pretty hand on the young man's shoulder, "when I was at school I hated Mangnall's questions. I never could answer one of them. *Please* don't be as tiresome as old Mangnall. Show me your treasures?"

Captain Featherstonhaugh was head over ears in love with this subtle, sophistical, graceful girl, who was indebted to her half Russian parentage for her easy method of turning his questions just the roads she desired, and throwing such a brilliant light on the breathing, palpitating present, that the poor shrouded ghosts of the past must needs have no presence there.

"What shall I show you first?" he said, drawing her hand within his arm. "I've made collections of all sorts of bric-à-brac."

"Show me your bomerangs, and dirks, and assegais," she said, laughing.

"Little savage," returned he, that soft light, which is love's peculiarity, illuminating each strongly marked feature. "Come! I will show you something romantic enough! Something which is more human than an assegai. Something I have often puzzled over, and in my own clumsy fashion twisted many a little story out of."

Captain Featherstonhaugh moved away to a curious oak cabinet, which completely filled a deep recess at the end of the room, and after fumbling in his pocket for a key, unlocked a drawer, the contents of which he commenced to turn over, whistling an old negro melody as a sort of accompaniment to his search.

Miss Boscowitch did not follow him. She remained at the mantelpiece, idly touching first one little curio, then another, not wholly happy nor wholly sad; the normal condition of the many.

"Ah! here it is!" came from the other end of the room, in Captain Featherstonhaugh's musical baritone.

He was standing facing Miss Boscowitch now, and shaking something gaily at her.

"I was determined not to lose it," he continued. "Who knows? Some day I may find the owner." As he spoke he came striding towards the mantelpiece, where Miss Boscowitch still stood with her air of indolent grace.

In his hand he held an ordinary runaway match-box, which, with a half amused smile, Miss Boscowitch held out her hand to receive.

Captain Featherstonhaugh hesitated a moment, then gave it her.

"Well! what's in it?" she said. "Matches, I suppose! Hugh, I believe you are playing a joke off on me." And then she drew the box from the lid, and saw within a little crumpled, stiffened, blood-stained white kid glove.

As the kid came into contact with the palm of her hand she turned deadly white. A question seemed to form itself on lip and eye, but no words came.

"How did it come there?" said Captain Featherstonhaugh, taking the glove from her passive hand. "Why don't you ask, Bertie?"

"Tell me," she said, simply.

"Of course you know how narrowly I escaped the massacre of Isandlana?" said Captain Featherstonhaugh. "The first battalion of the 2nd Regiment was, as you know, cut to pieces."

"Yes," said Miss Boscowitch, mechanically.

"I was sent with a party of officers to identify, if possible, the slain," he went on. "On the bare, bleak field lay the bodies of a score of men I had known and loved. To identify them, for the most part, was all but impossible. I saw a photograph of Lady X—— lying near a wrecked tent; I picked up a ring ——"

Captain Featherstonhaugh paused; he put his right foot meditatively on the fender, and gazed at the logs of pine which were blazing merrily and contrasting comfortably with the chill autumnal light, which touched the outside landscape with its own peculiar beauty. Miss Boscowitch had never stirred from the position into which she had sunk.

"I found the glove," he continued, meditatively, "lying at the side of an officer bathed in his blood. The name of the officer was ——"

Miss Boscowitch had risen with a despairing cry.

"*Was?*" she gasped.

"What does it matter to you, Bertie?" said Captain Featherston-haugh. "Why do you look like that? What possesses you?"

But she caught his arm, and her eyes sought his so wildly, whilst her lips repeated that one word *Was* so entreatingly, that Captain Featherstonhaugh forgot his surprise and dawning wrath in fear for her.

"Trelawny," he said, hastily.

"*Trelawny!*" As if reiteration were needed! "I knew it! I felt it! Oh, my love! This was *my* glove!" she exclaimed, in deep emotion, and then she fell back into the rocking-chair and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Looking at the bowed figure of the girl before him, Captain Featherstonhaugh felt that strange mixture of sentiments which spring from a sudden shock. Love and anger fought hard for the

mastery within him. He had told her, but a little before, if she had loved before, it would only make her even dearer to him. *Was* it so? A surging, tempestuous passion of words came sweeping upward to his lips. Why had she not told him the mystery of this glove? He moved away from her, and gazed out with a mighty effort, born of a strong control.

On the rough, wild, solitary moorlands which were stretching away for miles, a couple of large birds were taking lazy flight in that direction. He seemed to hear the beat of their wings. He was taking in each detail of the well-known scene of his home life with that sharpness of sense which is born of a new experience, whether of pleasure or pain.

Between himself and this girl he so loved, lay this small, white, blood-stained glove. Destiny had kept it safely locked away in its odd receptacle, to bring it forth at the moment of his newly-found joy; to rob him of its sweetness, by the torture of this sad yet in some sort gracious memory.

It was Miss Boscowitch who broke the stillness that seemed to fill the room after the first wild paroxysm of her grief had passed.

"The glove is mine," she said, brokenly. "I gave it to Captain Trelawny, to whom I was engaged, on the eve of his departure for that terrible campaign. He was to keep it always, carry it into the field of battle, and, on his happy return, it was to be an everlasting witness and badge of our love. I had not forgotten; but I had let the present overlay the past, and now, to-day, as if it were meant, I am met on the very threshold of your home by this strange, taunting question—How did it come there? I ask it painfully, Hugh—Why did it come there?"

Still not looking at Miss Boscowitch, Captain Featherstonhaugh moved and picked up the poor little glove, which lay at her feet. Anger and love had fought hard within him, and love had won the day.

"Did you really love him?" he asked, very sadly.

"Not as I love you—oh, not as I love you," she cried, rising and clinging to him. "I thought I loved him, Hugh; but when I met you, then I knew that I had never really loved Arthur Trelawny."

He bowed his tall form before her, perhaps in homage, perhaps to hide the emotion which overpowered him.

"Bertie, will you let me keep the glove?" he whispered. "It shall be sacred; shall bind us more closely together. Whether you loved him or not, this must be a sorrow to you. Make this sorrow as much yours as mine, love, as much mine as yours."

Miss Boscowitch could not reply then; but after a little, in this new, strange, subtle note of sympathy, she ceased to wonder—why it had come there.

A SECOND-HAND GOWN.

I.

IT was somewhere about six o'clock on a late May evening. Colonel Hunter was pacing restlessly up and down the short, broad gravelled terrace on which one of the long drawing-room windows opened. Judging by the erratic manner in which he alternately strode and stood, and the irritation with which he impatiently tapped the ashes from his pipe against the old sun-dial, he was decidedly out of temper.

He had just returned from an afternoon's calling expedition with his wife. To a man of his sociable temperament, living in one of the quietest of country neighbourhoods, this was usually a most pleasant experience. Certainly the neighbours were very few and very commonplace. Two or three families at a distance of some seven miles apart, and the large village of Swire, with its vicar, doctor, and lawyer, formed the whole of the most select society. But since Colonel Hunter had retired from the army, married, and generally "settled down," he seemed to prefer a quiet life, and to find all the amusement he needed in farming the property he had bought, in the moderate sport that the district afforded, and in the discussion with his neighbours of the few occurrences of local importance and interest.

But a new element had lately disturbed and unsettled this united little clique. Some three months ago rumour had arisen that Swire Cottage had been taken, and was being completely re-papered and painted. The ladies of the village had watched, with a considerable amount of interest, the arrival of two huge, lumbering furniture vans; and Mrs. Spence, the lawyer's wife, who had slipped into the Cottage to reconnoitre, had been able to report of such stores of furniture, of carpets and curtains of such a quality, as argued the owners to be of no small importance.

Nevertheless, when Mr. and Mrs. Gray, a young, newly-married couple, good-looking, totally without introductions, and apparently without friends or belongings in the neighbourhood, finally arrived at Swire Cottage, there was considerable hesitation among the best families as to whether they should be called upon or not.

Mrs. Hunter, who, in the absence of a resident squire at Swire, had constituted herself chief lady of the parish, held her ground firmly for some time. Heaven knew what kind of impostors the new comers might be! Where were they from? What did they want at Swire? Their name was Gray—well, anybody might be a Gray—and in the absence of Sir James Hastings, and now that her dear friend, his lamented mother, was dead, she felt it her duty to keep up the tone of the place. These remarks, being unanswerable,

naturally carried weight. Besides which, Mrs. Hunter's friendship abroad with the late Lady Hastings and her son (who for many years before the demise of the former had wandered about the Continent) though a fact which rested solely on her own testimony, gave her a claim to be heard, and a prestige of which she made frequent use.

But one day her husband burst into the drawing-room in a state of evident excitement. He had been over to Swire, to call on the Vicar, and for the first time he met Mr. and Mrs. Gray in the village.

"And Harriet, who do you think Mrs. Gray is?" he had eagerly asked his wife. "My good Lionel, it is impossible for me to tell," she had coolly replied; "probably some rich self-made man's daughter from a manufacturing place—some mill-owner." For it was already well known that there was no want of money at the Cottage.

"Not at all, not at all!" her husband had triumphantly replied, "She's pretty Miss Miles, whom I used to know at Pau! Surely I have often told you of her—Evelyn Miles? We had quite a long talk about old days, and I've promised that you shall go and call on her immediately."

Mrs. Hunter's face flushed. If retreat from her set-up opinions was indeed inevitable, it was for her to sound it, not her husband. She was not exactly a jealous woman; but when a man of forty marries a woman some few years his senior, with a good property of her own, the world is narrow-minded enough to refuse belief that it can be a love-match. And this had always rankled in Mrs. Hunter's mind. She felt, therefore, an instinctive, and perhaps unreasonable objection to her husband finding an old friend in pretty Mrs. Gray.

It was with a bad grace, and with her stiffest and most dignified air, that she had that afternoon accompanied Colonel Hunter to Swire Cottage; and this manner, instead of wearing off under the kindly welcome and pretty friendliness of young Mrs. Gray, had, to her husband's great annoyance, so increased and apparently hardened during the call that at parting it had amounted to an almost repellant hauteur.

So meditated Colonel Hunter as he now paced the terrace with a grave and anxious countenance. He had wished that these two women might have been friends. True, he had loved Evelyn Miles as he had never loved any other woman. Through the long sunny Pau winter he had been constantly thrown with the young and beautiful girl, who had scarcely yet made her *début*. An orphan of good family, yet penniless, and in charge of a good-natured uncle and aunt, who were very old friends of Colonel Hunter, she had appealed in every way to his romantic and generous nature. During their long rides over the Couteaux, in the little expeditions they had planned together, through the many evenings so quietly and happily spent at the Villa Pignotti, Colonel Hunter, though, as he reasoned with himself, almost old enough to be Evelyn's father, had learnt to love, and to love passionately. Through five months he had kept his secret well, and had

borne nobly with the treatment, as of a trusted old bachelor-friend, that Evelyn and her uncle and aunt had given him. And then it all came out—how he scarcely knew. But he remembered now, as though it were but yesterday, first the frightened and then the sorrowful look on the young girl's face, the tears that streamed down her cheeks as she seized his hand in both of hers, and begged him to forgive all the pain she had so unknowingly inflicted on her "dear old friend."

After that things were confused. He remembered a rapid journey into Italy, some months of wandering there, and he had then accepted the invitation of a friend to join a summer-party for Norway.

Harriet Conway had been one of the party, and she was cut out for him, his friend said. Fair and phlegmatic, never out of temper, never too weary, a perfect—almost too perfect—a lady, and with plenty of money of her own, what more could a man desire? She made no difficulties or bother, and a year after the great experience of his life at Pau he found himself married and settled down at Swire Old House.

And now, above all things he must keep from Harriet the knowledge of that great experience. He could trust Evelyn perfectly; that much he had learnt from her glad look when he told her of his marriage in the village street, and from the frank, unembarrassed way in which she had treated him. His wife could have no grounds for suspicion from anything in Mrs. Gray's manner. What then could account for her incomprehensible behaviour that afternoon? There could be only one reason, and it was the thought of that which furrowed Colonel Hunter's brow, and accounted for the viciousness with which he bit his pipe-stem.

A miserable reason! A most unfortunate piece of ill-luck! What could have induced Evelyn to wear that confounded dress—just that special afternoon that they were calling? Was it possible that her aunt never told her of the giver! He remembered clearly how earnestly he had begged Mrs. Miles to relieve him of the strange and beautiful Indian silk, with its peculiarly scrolled pattern, that he had bought in a lot at the sale of the cargo of a ship at Aden. The good lady had at first refused; but afterwards, being over-persuaded by the Colonel's entreaties and reproaches, and, perhaps, by the sight of the silk itself, she had relented, and accepted a portion on her niece's behalf. So far so good, and Harriet, his wife, could never have divined from whence Mrs. Gray's dress had come, had it not been that barely six months ago Colonel Hunter, in looking over some chests, had come upon the remainder of the bale, and forthwith given it to his wife, telling her good-humouredly, that it would make her a "fine frock."

Could it be possible that Mrs. Hunter had recognised, and with a woman's penetration traced, the identity of the source of both gowns, and all the consequences Mrs. Gray's possession of such a gift from her husband might involve?

Meanwhile Mrs. Hunter stood at her bedroom window, and watched her unconscious husband as he walked on the terrace below.

She was a tall, handsome woman of forty-six. Her face was clearly cut, and as a rule almost colourless; but just now her cheeks were slightly flushed, and her manner betrayed an unusual mood. Bright, small, real grey eyes were planted very near the rise of a cool, thin, aquiline nose. Her lips were also thin, but not ill-tempered. Her thick, fair, straight hair, small white teeth, and perfectly unlined face, made her appear quite ten years younger than she really was. She was stout, without being fat, and was very handsomely dressed. None of Mrs. Hunter's friends had ever seen her out of temper; but now her large, well-shaped white hands grasped nervously at the ornaments of the dressing-table, and she occasionally murmured to herself in vexation.

She must have so stood, almost motionless and intently watching her husband, for at least a quarter of an hour, when with a sudden movement, as though her mind was finally made up, and with a last anxious look at the walker below, she abruptly left the window.

She hurried across the bedroom and through a little dressing-room adjoining, which led into a tastefully-furnished boudoir. The room was at the side of the house, and commanded a wide view over the park ground, hemmed in to the left by a pretty copse of spruce-firs and other trees. But the landscape had no beauties for Mrs. Hunter this evening. She rang the bell sharply, and then sank, with a worried air, into a great easy-chair beside the window, as her maid entered.

"You're always late now, Frilling," she said captiously; "I ought to have begun to dress for dinner long ago."

"I beg pardon, ma'am, it's scarcely seven o'clock."

"Always an answer ready! And you know how I particularly dislike that kind of thing. Why have you left the windows open so late? Quite enough to give me my death of cold."

Frilling glanced enquiringly at her mistress, and deemed it wiser not to remind her that she had given orders that the boudoir window was never to be shut before dressing-time. She wondered what could have happened to put so even-tempered a lady out of sorts.

There was a pause of silence, which Mrs. Hunter broke. "Frilling!" said she, suddenly, "Do you remember that roll of curious Indian silk which the Colonel gave me about six months ago?"

"Of course I do, ma'am," was the discreetly simple reply.

"Well, do you remember what became of it?" pursued her mistress. It was a disagreeable subject, very—and one she did not care to refer to, but she must get at the bottom of the matter, and discover from whence Mrs. Gray had procured the silk dress she had worn that day.

"You gave it to me, ma'am," said Frilling, treading her ground carefully, and not quite sure how much or how little of the incident she was expected to remember.

"Nonsense," retorted the lady sharply, "that's one of your shifty ways. You know all about it as well as I do, if you only choose to think a moment. I gave it to you to sell for me when Jeanne sent in that monstrous bill. I had scarcely a penny by me. I want to know, Frilling, what you did with it."

Finding, to her great surprise, that it was really the whole truth which was wanted of her, Frilling spoke up with courage.

"I took it to Mr. Jacobs, a friend of mine, ma'am, and he bought it of me, and gave me £10, I think it was the money, if you remember, ma'am, for it, and said he'd never come across such a beautiful stuff in all his life, and never seen the like of it; he admired those funny scrolls and dragons so much. A good bargain he got of it too, ma'am, for he ——"

"Hush! tut!" interrupted Mrs. Hunter, impatiently. "Who cares for that? This Mr. Jacobs, what is he? A pawnbroker?"

"Well, ma'am, I don't think that you would just call him a pawnbroker only; he's a——"

"Well, well. A dealer in second-hand clothing, and such like?"

"Not only that neither, ma'am. You see he's a gentleman of considerable prop ——"

"Rubbish, girl. Why can't you be straightforward for once in your life? I see what the man is, perfectly, and you can call him what you like. The long and the short of the matter is, that you sold the silk to a pawnbroker. And perhaps, Frilling, it was the best thing you could do with it."

Then Mrs. Hunter rose to dress for dinner, with the consciousness of a triumph without sweetness.

II.

Dinner, that stately meal, was passed. The servants had finally quitted the room, and Colonel and Mrs. Hunter were left alone, with only the mild intervention of the dessert and flowers possible.

The conversation, which had struggled to maintain its interest on ordinary, threadbare subjects, now flagged altogether, and it was a silence of several very long minutes that Colonel Hunter broke with the question which had been on his lips for the last hour.

"Well, Harriet! And what do you think of the Grays?"

The very atmosphere of the room seemed suddenly changed and laden with interest. Mrs. Hunter paused slightly before replying:

"My dear, I can never give an opinion in the off-hand kind of manner you wish. But I dare say they are very good sort of people —in their way."

"What do you mean by 'in their way,' Harriet?" said the Colonel, ready to take offence. "Their way is our way, I suppose, and most other people's way."

Mrs. Hunter smiled pityingly at her husband.

"No; there I don't agree with you. Mr. Gray seems a tolerably gentlemanlike young man, and Mrs. Gray is very pretty, but she——"

Colonel Hunter waited impatiently for his wife to finish her sentence. He cracked more nuts than it was possible or even likely that he could eat, and when well surrounded by the fragments and powder of their shells looked up.

"Go on—I'm waiting. 'But she' what?"

Mrs. Hunter gave the little jerk forward to her body and tip backward to her chair that was preparatory to her leaving the table.

"I don't like to say it. You will probably be offended. But a man's bachelor friends" (coaxingly) "are so different! Of course, it doesn't matter who he knows then. I am sure," suddenly changing her tactics, "that you yourself will own you do not wish *me* to be too intimate with these Grays."

Colonel Hunter flushed quickly, and began with warmth: "There is nothing"—But he checked himself, and after a short, awkward silence, continued:

"I don't understand you women, Harriet. I don't quite see what you're driving at. When I knew Mrs. Gray as Miss Miles, she always appeared to me to be perfect. And you—you seem to insinuate that she's not—that she's not, in fact, what you would call 'quite the thing.'"

"That's it," cried Mrs. Hunter, eagerly following up her husband; and so grateful to him for having spared her the disagreeable task of putting unacceptable thoughts into words, that she did not notice the suppressed irritation and irony of his voice. "That's it! You see you're not so dense, after all, Lionel. These people, who seemed to you the pattern of all that was nice and proper before your marriage, you now cannot help looking at with different eyes, and judging by a different standard."

"It's nothing of the kind," shouted the Colonel, roused by this strange misrepresentation of his feelings into an anger that his wife had never before seen. "I look at people with exactly the same eyes. I'm not the least different, nor are they. If Mrs. Gray is not a lady, show it to me! What did she do that was the least unladylike to-day? What was there in her manners, her house, her——?"

He was on the point of adding "her dress," when, with a sudden remembrance, he abruptly pulled himself up, and looked guiltily at his wife.

Mrs. Hunter was gazing straight across at him with a peculiar expression on her handsome face. Truth to tell, she was congratulating herself upon her husband's stupidity, for it was clear to her now that, so far, she was free from the dread of his discovering the fate of the present he had given her in that beautiful silk: he had

not recognized it on Mrs. Gray. But Colonel Hunter could not read his wife's thoughts, and he waited almost breathlessly for her to speak. What did her look mean? Had she discovered all, or was she only suspicious of him? She paused in the act of leaving the table, with her white hands outspread, and lightly touching the snowy cloth with her finger-tips. The tone of her voice when she at last spoke surprised and reassured him. It was conciliatory, even pleading.

"Lionel," she said, gently, "you must allow a woman's superiority of judgment in such matters. There are a thousand little things we women notice, and perhaps I in especial, that you great, good-natured, stupid men never see—things impossible to put into words. Trust me. I shall be perfectly civil to the Grays; but I will not take them up violently, and as leader of the Swire society, I shall do all in my power to prevent other people doing so."

And Mrs. Hunter swept majestically through the dining-room door that her husband had risen to open for her. She felt quite courageous now. The tête-à-tête which she had dreaded as all-important was over. He had evidently noticed nothing in the silk that could compromise her. That being the case, the probabilities were that he would continue unobservant.

But as for poor Colonel Hunter, he returned to his chair and his wine with a wretched feeling of uncertainty for the present, and of certainty of danger in the future. Had his wife noticed Mrs. Gray's dress, drawn her own conclusions, and was she now treating him with a half-contemptuous generosity? The Colonel groaned inwardly. He feared the only course of behaviour open to him was one of proper submission to his lady's will. What would she make of it if she learnt that he had once given Evelyn that lovely dress.

III.

It was a bright June afternoon, one of those delightful days when the sun is not yet sure enough of summer to be too hot, and the cold spring winds are altogether passed.

Mrs. Hunter had been gardening, and was now resting, in a long, low basket chair, which she had turned so as to command a good view of the conservatory, opening out of the drawing-room; and as she reclined in the basket-chair, her hands, with their large gardening-gloves, playing with a blight-brusher, a wide hat on the ground beside her, and a brown holland apron with a protecting bib over her rustling gown, she reflected with some irritation that it was positively monstrous of the Colonel to insist on suspending an Abyssinian head-dress from the Roman lamp which hung in the arch of a recess opposite.

These meditations were unpleasantly interrupted by the sudden announcement of a visitor, and before Mrs. Hunter had time to divest herself completely of her apron and gloves, Mrs. Black entered.

Mrs. Black, as befitted the wife of the country doctor, came in with all due modesty. She was a short, plump little woman, in a gown

which, from the many anxious looks and pats bestowed upon it, was evidently "on" for the first time. Mrs. Black's smiling mouth and ample chin might have convinced all beholders of frankest good-nature, but somehow she rarely gave that impression. Perhaps this was due to a way she had of suddenly turning upon you and asking a leading question, at the same time fixing you with her small, clever eye.

Mrs. Hunter inquired after the health of the seven children, discussed the weather, deplored with her visitor the near advent of the Swire fair, with its accompanying noise and drinking, and reflected to herself with despair that there was not another subject of interest which she shared in common with the doctor's wife.

Suddenly Mrs. Black, turning sharply, inquired of Mrs. Hunter whether she had yet called on the new people at the Cottage.

"Oh dear, yes; of course, it was my duty: I am surprised you had not heard," replied Mrs. Hunter. She was always disconcerted by the sudden movements and questions of the younger lady.

"Yes, I did hear, and I went to call too. What do you think of them, Mrs. Hunter?"

But a kindly chance spared the lady the necessity of an immediate and unconsidered answer. At this moment the door was again opened, and Mrs. Dacres was announced.

There was a great difference between Mrs. Dacres' entrance into a room and that of Mrs. Black. The Vicar's wife was a resolute, good-looking woman of about two or three and thirty, considerably younger than either of the two other ladies. She stepped across the long drawing-room with a firm, light tread, and shook Mrs. Hunter's languid hand warmly. She gave Mrs. Black also much the same greeting, for she had acquired from her husband a good deal of the evenness and suavity of manner necessary in a parish priest. She wore a simple hat and a plain, black gown, looped high up, and showing rather more than is usual of a well-shaped foot and ankle. Her voice was clear if somewhat hard, and bore traces of the leading of the village choir, and perhaps of some of the imperiousness contracted by years of Sunday School teaching. She dropped briskly into a little carved Florentine chair, and began the conversation with vigour.

"Hope I find you quite well, Mrs. Hunter. I've been up seeing your coachman's wife—what a nice, tidy body she is! I couldn't resist dropping in for a little chat with you. Isn't it a charming day, Mrs. Black?"

Now, the Doctor's wife knew from a long and tried experience that when Mrs. Dacres once got the whip-hand in a conversation there was not much chance for anyone else. So, ignoring all preliminary remarks, she brought the stream of talk back at once to the channel in which she wished it to flow.

"We were talking of the Grays, Mrs. Dacres. Of course you have seen them. What do *you* think of them?"

"Oh, they appear to me extremely nice people," was the ready reply. "I have seen quite a lot of them already. Mrs. Gray is going to take the first class of girls for me in the Sunday School. I always felt that a great drag, you know; and now I can keep a sharper look out on the little boys, who are always so noisy and troublesome. I and my husband called at the Cottage directly they came, and they have dined with us, quite quietly, since. Mrs. Gray is a very pretty and charming person, and her husband seems a well-read, clever young man, who has evidently seen a good deal of society. We think them a great acquisition to the neighbourhood —don't you, Mrs. Hunter?"

Mrs. Hunter laughed a little. The Vicar's wife, with her flow of words, had given her time to form a plan of action, and she was now ready with her answer.

"Well, I don't know that I am prepared to be as enthusiastic as you, Mrs. Dacres. I called the other day with my husband; but I confess I put it off as long as I possibly could. And the Grays did not strike me as being anything so *very* special. Very nice sort of people, I daresay. But, you see, coming into the neighbourhood in this mysterious kind of way, without former friends or ties of any kind, one is apt to feel rather suspicious. If my dear friend Lady Hastings were alive, I find myself thinking what would *she* do? She was a very particular woman. And being, so to speak, in her place, I feel I must be very careful how I commit myself. I can assure you that the whole matter is quite a responsibility to me—quite."

"What a load of care will be taken off your mind when young Sir James marries and comes home," remarked Mrs. Black, gazing out on the distant fields. "You must quite long for it."

A shade of vexation crossed Mrs. Hunter's face, but it passed as she replied:

"Yes; but I'm afraid we can't expect that for many years yet. Let me see. He can't be more than five or six and twenty, and young men with plenty of means are never in a hurry to settle down. But how nice it would be to welcome him back! Dear boy! Such a handsome boy as he was, too! His mother was perfectly devoted to him. She would scarcely talk of anything else."

"Ah, you knew them very intimately, did you not?" said Mrs. Black. "Let me think, now," with her sudden movement, and fixing her gaze on Mrs. Hunter, "how many years is it that you've known them?"

"*Them?* You mean *him*," replied the lady, glad to take advantage of her disagreeable questioner's slip. "It must be quite five years since poor dear Lady Hastings died."

"Yes, yes; I know that," pursued Mrs. Black. "But where did you first know Lady Hastings?"

Mrs. Hunter hastily reviewed in her own mind the possibilities of dressing up, at this moment's notice, her few months' acquaintance

with the late Lady Hastings into the appearance of the life-long friendship it had gradually assumed in the eyes of her neighbours. Mrs. Dacres came unconsciously to the rescue.

"Oh, never mind about that now, Mrs. Black! I thought everyone knew that Mrs. Hunter has known the Hastings' all her life. But tell me," turning to Mrs. Hunter, "what makes you speak of the Grays as though they were questionable? Have you noticed anything strange about them? Mrs. Gray is so very ——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mrs. Hunter, "she's very pretty, and all that, and naturally people will be taken with her. But I must form my own judgment. You know I've travelled a good deal abroad—met many strange people—heard many strange things. No matter. I don't wish to prejudice anyone else against Mrs. Gray. But, personally ——"

"Do you know anything about her? Have you heard anything against her?" eagerly inquired Mrs. Black, leaning forward.

There was an impressive pause, and then Mrs. Hunter answered:

"I don't exactly feel myself at liberty to say what I *have* heard and what I *haven't*. On dits are often misleading. But I *do* know something of her, and I don't care to know much more."

Then Mrs. Dacres, curiously impressed, led the conversation to other matters, and the visitors soon took their leave.

They had scarcely left the drawing-room when Colonel Hunter entered through the long window that opened from the terrace.

"Well, Harriet," he said, good-humouredly, "so you've been holding a reception. I heard you had callers, and when I once distinguished Mrs. Dacres' voice, I thought it better to keep at a distance. I can't like a loud-voiced woman."

Mrs. Hunter was feeling particularly amiable. She had the pleasurable consciousness of having said exactly what she wanted, and in exactly the right words.

"Naughty man, to leave me all the talking to do!" she cried. "And that horrid little woman, Black, bores me so intensely. She sat here for at least an hour. She was wanting tea, I know, but I was determined not to give her any. Now, Mrs. Dacres I really think is rather nice. She talks loudly, certainly, and dresses oddly; but that's far better than Mrs. Black, with her village attempts at fashion. And Mrs. Dacres is so perfectly well-bred."

Colonel Hunter laughed. "I confess," he said, "that among the requirements of *my* perfectly well-bred lady, a low voice stands first. Why," glancing kindly at his wife, "that's what I admired, to begin with, in you."

"And nothing more afterwards?" she inquired, archly.

Colonel Hunter bent and kissed the smooth forehead, as the apparent, and perhaps the easiest answer.

"But what did you all find to chatter about for so long?" he presently asked. "Have any of the little Blacks got the measles, or are Mrs. Dacres' servants leaving?"

"What nonsense you talk!" laughed his wife. "Do you suppose that we ladies have nothing else to speak about but children and servants? Why, we discussed the weather, and the harvest prospects, and the fair, and a thousand other things—not to speak of the Grays," she added.

"The Grays?" The Colonel's face showed a sudden interest. "And what had you to say about the Grays?"

"Oh, *I?* Nothing, of course. Why, I know nothing of them. But the Dacres seem to have seen a good deal of them, and ——"

"Well, *she* didn't agree with your opinion of Mrs. Gray, I'm sure. But perhaps you were wise, and refrained from expressing any?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'agreeing with my opinion,' and my 'expressing any,'" said Mrs. Hunter, in a voice whose coldness contrasted sharply with her husband's warmth of tone. "Mrs. Dacres evidently thinks their whole appearance in the neighbourhood as strange as I do, and so would anybody of any judgment. You mark my words, Lionel. These Grays won't have been here a year before something very strange comes out about them. And then, perhaps, you'll be sorry you did not go by your wife's judgment, for once in your life."

Colonel Hunter was in no mood to be amused, as he might otherwise have been, by the semi-tragedy of the voice and words.

"It seems to me," he said crossly, "you women always manage to speak ill of each other. Why, only yesterday I met Dacres, and he was saying what a delightful woman Mrs. Gray was, and how much he and his wife both liked her. And to-day, I suppose, you all spent your time in picking her to pieces and abusing her."

"That's like you!" cried his wife, rising from her low chair and gathering up her hat and apron with an air of righteous indignation. "Just like you men—you're all the same! If only a woman has a pretty face and smiles upon you, the best and the wisest of you are all ready to fall at her feet and call her an angel! I have no patience with it. You and Mr. Dacres ought to know better. She is *not* a nice woman. I have told you so before, and I have my reasons for saying so. If you were not blinded by her looks—if she were old and ugly, instead of—of appearing young and charming, you would be both ready enough to agree with me. A man of your age and experience ought to know better."

Mrs. Hunter's voice trembled with anger. But by her last words and their tone her frightened husband was recalled to himself, and to the danger he ran of detection should he espouse the cause too warmly. He stood silent, somewhat sulky, reflecting on his powerlessness to defend Evelyn even by word. He waited defiantly, almost expecting a further torrent of his wife's accusations to burst upon him.

But Mrs. Hunter paused, looking at her husband irresolutely. She, for her part, was afraid that she had gone a little too far. The Colonel might be roused into demanding of her what the dark

facts were concerning Mrs. Gray, at which she had hinted. And that was what she could never divulge—never.

IV.

It was a hot day in August, and the day of the great garden-party that Mr. and Mrs. Dacres gave every summer to their friends; a day important enough to be ranked with the first hunt breakfast, or even with the Hunters' dinner-parties.

Following the last carriage through the Vicarage gate, we find ourselves on a wide green lawn, and in the company of the whole neighbourhood for ten miles around. Seldom seen squires and parsons, with blooming wives and daughters, and sons straight from the University, all were there. Some strolled about and admired the brilliant geraniums and lobellias in Mr. Dacres' flower-beds; some of the younger and more enthusiastic were already filling the tennis-courts; while some preferred the sweet shade of the rose-walk which led to the churchyard.

Colonel and Mrs. Hunter were of course among the guests, and had just shaken hands with their hostess. Mrs. Hunter stood glancing critically at the costumes that floated by, restful in the consciousness that none was likely to be comparable in beauty with Jeanne's last master-piece. A soft voice sounded in her ear:

"How do you do, Mrs. Hunter? Is it not terribly hot? Don't you think we might find a cooler place?"

Mrs. Hunter turned and faced Mrs. Gray, who, robed in a dress of softest Eastern silk, stood smiling rather timidly beside her.

It was a lovely face; there was no doubt at all about it. But what eyes could Mrs. Hunter have for anything but the dress, the unmistakable silk, with its strangely scrolled pattern, that fell so gracefully round Evelyn's slight figure? For one moment she paused voiceless, and turned rather pale. The sudden apparition had startled her. Then she answered suavely enough:

"Ah! Mrs. Gray! Yes, the sun is unbearable. Let us go to the rose-walk."

The two ladies turned and sauntered leisurely off together, to the great delight of Colonel Hunter, who stood near watching.

"How nice and cool the white dresses of those girls look," said the wily Mrs. Hunter, opening the conversation as they passed the tennis-ground; "how I wish that I could wear one still!"

"Yes," agreed Evelyn, "I always think young people look better in white than in anything else. I am almost sorry I did not wear it myself to-day; it is so very hot. But like you, I thought it juvenile for a married woman, at a stately party like this."

Mrs. Hunter was prompt to take advantage of her opportunity. "Oh, I am so glad you didn't," she said; "nothing could be more lovely than the dress you are wearing. Such a soft silk and such a wonderful blending of colours. I have never seen so beautiful a

thing in my life. Will you excuse me?—Is it a very rude question to ask?—But where can you have procured it?" and she turned with her sweetest smile to Mrs. Gray as she spoke.

The younger lady blushed deeply before she answered, and there was some hesitation in her voice:

"You will think it so strange," she said at last, "and I don't know how to explain. I cannot tell you where it came from, because I do not know. My aunt gave me the dress in my *trousseau*—but there was some mystery about it—she would not tell me where she got it from." And Evelyn looked straight at her questioner, the frankness of her eyes contradicting the embarrassment of her blushes.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Hunter, in her stiffest voice, and with an instant change of manner; "as you remark, it is certainly very strange." And making some slight excuse, she abruptly turned, leaving Mrs. Gray alone in the rose walk.

"Now," thought Evelyn, with a sigh, "I have somehow managed to offend her again; and she seemed inclined to be more friendly. How stupid of me! I wish Aunt Lucy had not made such a secret about nothing: why could she not tell me where it came from?" thoughtfully smoothing the soft folds. "She said she had had the silk by her for some time. Dear, mysterious old Aunt Lucy! Ah," looking up, "how do you do, Colonel Hunter! Your wife has just deserted me, so you have come to keep me from feeling lonely."

Colonel Hunter turned to walk with Evelyn. "You and my wife are getting quite friends," he said, gaily. "I saw you walking off together."

Evelyn smiled. "Indeed," she said, "I wish we were. For I like your wife much, and want her to like me. But I am afraid she does not care for me; and just now I seem so unfortunate as to have offended her."

"Offended her? You offended her? Oh, impossible!" cried the Colonel. "Tell me what it was all about?"

"Nothing very much. It was my own fault, and I am so sorry for it. Mrs. Hunter kindly admired my dress, and asked me where I got it from, and she did not seem pleased that I could not tell her."

The Colonel staggered in his walk. He tried to realise the situation. His wife knew all then—and had known, he could not tell how long. What vague suspicions and ideas might she not be harbouring of him? He knew her tendency to be jealous. Controlling himself, he asked, with apparent indifference, the answer that Mrs. Gray had given.

"That is the unlucky part," she replied; "I could not give her any answer, for I do not myself know where Aunt Lucy got this dress from. And that is what seemed to offend Mrs. Hunter. Indeed," flushing slightly, "she almost seemed to doubt my word."

Gazing into her innocent face, the Colonel could never have doubted Evelyn's truthfulness; and it was impossible for him, at that

moment, to reveal himself to his fair companion as the giver of the dress she wore. He saw how it was—that Mrs. Miles had never mentioned to her his connection with it. Presently they returned to the other visitors on the lawn, and mixing among their friends, soon got separated.

Colonel Hunter found himself standing beside his wife, who was delicately sipping claret-cup under a spreading tree. He examined her countenance carefully, to see if it bore the marks which he expected to find, and flew to procure for her a more comfortable chair, and a mat for her feet.

Mrs. Hunter, assured by these signs of devotion that her lord was still quite unsuspicious of the use she had made of his present to her of the beautiful silk, was in her turn particularly gracious; and the Colonel felt fairly puzzled.

V.

Mrs. Spence, the lawyer's wife, was "at home" every Wednesday afternoon. But that she was not expecting visitors on this particular Wednesday afternoon was apparent from the haste with which she hurried a basket of socks under the sofa as the front-door bell sounded loudly through the house. For the rain was coming down.

There was much aggravating scuffling and laying aside of umbrellas in the passage before the maid finally opened the door, and announced "Mrs. Dacres and Mrs. Black."

In her confusion at this double influx, Mrs. Spence had scarcely presence of mind to give the organised signal for "tea" to her servant. But Sarah rose to the occasion, and the visitors had not been seated ten minutes before a tray was brought in laden with Mrs. Spence's best china, and followed by an array of cakes.

As was natural, the conversation soon turned to the subject of Mrs. Dacres' garden-party of a week ago, and both Mrs. Spence and Mrs. Black were voluble in their congratulations on the success of the entertainment.

"Yes," said the Vicar's wife, in her clear tones, and with some pardonable pride, "considering how many people we had, I think the time passed off very well. There was not one contretemps."

"Or scarcely one," interrupted Mrs. Black, who seemed to be marking with absorbed interest the flight of the heavy clouds over the leaden sky. "I suppose you would not exactly count Mrs. Hunter's quarrel with Mrs. Gray as a contretemps."

The other two ladies stared at the Doctor's wife in amazement, and Mrs. Dacres spoke.

"Indeed you are quite mistaken," she said, rather sharply. "Far from Mrs. Hunter having quarrelled with Mrs. Gray—a thing I cannot imagine her doing with anyone—I am glad to say that at our party they seemed to get quite good friends, and went to sit in the rose-walk together."

"Yes, indeed," followed up Mrs. Spence, seconding the Vicar's wife against Mrs. Black; "I saw them myself."

Thus attacked, Mrs. Black turned on Mrs. Dacres. "Oh, I saw them go off there, too!" she said, nodding wisely her head, with its canopy of flowers and ribbons. "But I happened to be walking there myself a few minutes later, and I saw Mrs. Hunter turn suddenly, with that particular air of queen she sometimes puts on, and leave Mrs. Gray standing alone, evidently frightened out of her wits, poor young lady!"

"You don't mean it!" cried Mrs. Spence. "Now, I do call that unkind! I can't, for the life of me, think why Mrs. Hunter doesn't like Mrs. Gray. I'm sure she can never have done anything to vex her, and *I* like her so very much."

"Oh, you see," said Mrs. Dacres, standing up for the absent lady, "Mrs. Hunter has, of course, to be more careful than we have as to whom she calls upon and knows intimately. She owes that to the memory of Lady Hastings."

"Owes that to the memory of Lady Fiddlesticks!" cried Mrs. Black, forgetting in her excitement all manners, and becoming alarmingly natural. "I don't believe a word of that grand friendship with Lady Hastings. It's just an excuse for her intolerable airs, nothing else. How are we to know that she has ever even seen Lady Hastings? Where," turning almost fiercely on Mrs. Spence, "where's her proof of it?"

"Oh, that's very true," hastily agreed the lawyer's lady. "Of course we can't tell. She doesn't seem to have any proof."

"Oh, but that's rubbish!" interrupted Mrs. Dacres, decidedly. "Of course she knew Lady Hastings and her son; knew them well, too. Why, I've often heard her describe young Sir James."

"Have you?" said Mrs. Black, with burning sarcasm. "I believe I've had that privilege, too. But just you wait till Sir James comes home, and see."

"Well," said Mrs. Spence, with a mild attempt at bringing the conversation back to more peaceable subjects. "All that has nothing to do with pretty Mrs. Gray."

"Yes it has," cried Mrs. Black, not to be silenced now that she had the opportunity of venting some of her long-suppressed ill-feeling towards Mrs. Hunter. "It has everything to do with Mrs. Gray! And I say that it's an abominable shame a stuck-up woman like that should tease and persecute a pretty, nice young thing—and for such a reason, too!"

At this point Mrs. Dacres, who made it a principle never to listen to any village gossip, rose to take her leave. Mrs. Spence almost hurried her from the house, and then drew her chair nearer to Mrs. Black's.

"Dear me!" she said, her whole face bright with the expectation of news. "Now, what motive can she have for behaving so to poor Mrs. Gray?"

"Why, don't you know?" returned Mrs. Black. "Of course the reason's plain enough. Colonel Hunter knew Mrs. Gray before he was married, and his wife's as jealous as she can hold together."

"Dear, dear, dear! To think of it!" ejaculated the lawyer's wife. "That's the reason, is it? Well, I never! Do you know I always thought it was because the Grays are nobodies—and Mrs. Hunter's so very proud. Not that I'm so sure that they are no ——" Mrs. Spence checked herself abruptly, and writhed under Mrs. Black's formidable eye.

"What were you going to say?" she enquired. "You weren't sure of what?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" stammered the frightened lady. "I—I really don't know what I was going to say."

"You were saying that you weren't sure the Grays were nobodies, I think," pursued her tormentor, never for one moment removing the fascination of her terrible eye. "Now what makes you think that?"

"Oh, I don't know! nothing at all!" hesitated Mrs. Spence, vainly trying to get beyond the reach of that fixed gaze. "Only my husband—but indeed it's nothing!"

"Now, you know this is quite ridiculous," said Mrs. Black sternly. "Why do you make such a fuss about nothing? What does your husband think?"

Poor Mrs. Spence held out for a little longer. Then the heads of the two ladies drew gradually nearer and nearer together. And when Mrs. Black at last left the house it was with a new and mysterious expression on her face.

Meeting Mrs. Gray in the village, she stopped and surprised her by quite a flow of friendliness. This was unusual; for hitherto, whatever opinion she might express of Mrs. Hunter in private, she had implicitly followed that lady's lead in society, including even her cool treatment of the Grays.

VI.

It was the evening of the first and grandest of the series of dinner-parties that Colonel and Mrs. Hunter gave every winter.

Mrs. Hunter, beautifully dressed, her piles of fair hair arranged to perfection, sat awaiting her guests, impatiently balancing a beaded and embroidered slipper on the point of her narrow foot. Colonel Hunter, giving a finishing touch to his tie at the mirror in the drawing-room, addressed his wife over his shoulder.

"And who am I to take in, my dear?"

"Oh! you'll take in Mrs. Dalrymple, of course. She's a baronet's daughter, and the only one among the lot with a vestige of a title. I suppose I must have that odious old bookworm, Dr. Grubbs, who can talk of nothing but the origin of things, or some such folly. Such a pity the Winters couldn't come. I've had to ask the Blacks at the last moment to fill up their place."

"Let me see. We've the Dalrymples, and the Maitlands, and the Dacres, and the Grays ——"

"The Grays? Certainly not. You don't suppose I was going to ask them, do you?"

"My dear! It's impossible you can have been so rude as to leave them out!"

"Indeed I have. I have done it with full consideration. I am determined to show the neighbourhood clearly that I, for my part, will give no countenance to ——"

Mrs. Hunter was cut short in her somewhat excited explanation by the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Maitland; and the other guests soon assembled.

Then followed the lengthy dinner, which it was Mrs. Hunter's pride to plan, and the pleasure of her guests to devour. Course succeeded course in duly prescribed order; delicious wines, hot-house fruits and rare flowers delighted the senses. Colonel Hunter, happy and hospitable, beamed upon his friends, and led the conversation at his end of the table. Mrs. Hunter also did her part well by looking handsome, and listening patiently to Dr. Grubbs' careful explanation of the origin and development of the art of cooking.

Dinner was over at last. Mrs. Dalrymple had caught Mrs. Hunter's eye, the fear of missing which signal had completely marred her enjoyment of the pine-apple, and the ladies had retired to the drawing-room, with its consoling compensations of coffee and gossip. As seems customary, they all gathered round the fire-place, for though it was still early in October the evening was chilly, and a bright fire blazed on the hearth.

The slight pause, caused by the internal criticism passed by each lady upon the rest, after the first sip of coffee, was broken by Mrs. Black, who was splendidly attired in crimson satin.

"I am surprised not to meet the Grays here to-night, Mrs. Hunter," she said. "Couldn't they come?"

"I really don't know," responded her hostess languidly, glad that her words should be clearly heard by all present, "for I did not ask them."

There was a slight murmur among the ladies, which Mrs. Hunter took for approval. Then Mrs. Black spoke again.

"Not ask them? How very strange! And I suppose people are speaking and thinking of nothing else!"

But Mrs. Hunter did not gather the full drift of Mrs. Black's remarks. She only thought that the Doctor's wife was angry at being invited so unmistakably at the last moment to "fill up," and was in consequence trying to make herself disagreeable. She answered with the same air of well-bred indifference, and without raising her eyes:

"You see I don't care to have people for my guests who, as you say, are the talk of the whole neighbourhood. I have always held that a lady should never be talked about."

A hum of confused voices rose, whispered half-sentences, and Mrs. Black's above the rest, saying: "Dear me! I thought she was so very intimate with the Hastings family!" Mrs. Hunter, with a horrible presentiment of coming evil, looked up and round for explanation. Mrs. Dacres touched her arm.

"But what does it all mean?" she inquired. "What are they all talking of? And what has Sir James Hastings to do with the Grays?"

"Come," said Mrs. Dacres, drawing her hostess into the quaintly adorned recess close by, "and I will explain it all to you."

When there the Vicar's wife began hurriedly: "You do not know? How very strange! Everybody has heard. It seems—indeed, you will scarcely believe it—that these Grays, whom we all like so much, are not really Grays at all, but young Sir James Hastings and his wife. They were married just before they came down here, and then, by way of finding out what the people about are like, and all that kind of thing, they took the name of Gray, and went into the Cottage. Of course, the whole affair was more of a joke than anything else. But you see we were completely taken in—even you," with a doubtful look at her listener, "who used to know Sir James so well. I believe it was Mr. Spence who first began to suspect something of who they really were, and he told his wife, and she went and told Mrs. Black, and then, of course, it wasn't a secret for very long. Sir James was laughing with us about it to-day."

Mrs. Hunter sat white and rigid, as though she had been turned into stone, while Mrs. Dacres spoke. From the first moment that the disclosure was begun she had seen the whole thing, its undeniable truth, its shattering consequences. With a smile, which from its ghastliness positively alarmed the Vicar's wife, she rose from the sofa and returned to her guests.

The stream of talk flowed on, soon swelled by the gentlemen, and, as was natural, the chief topic of conversation was the return of Sir James and his young bride. Mrs. Hunter carefully avoided her husband's eye, though she could not but hear every word of the accounts he had to give of his former acquaintance with Lady Hastings as Miss Miles.

She went through the evening as in a dream. Nothing but the extraordinary force of her will kept her from bursting into violent hysterics. She thought her visitors would never take their leave, and when, after what seemed to her a life-time of agony, the last carriage rolled away and her husband returned from seeing it off, he found her lying back on a sofa, with her handkerchief pressed to her eyes.

Colonel Hunter was far too generous to take any advantage of his wife's discomfiture: besides which, the fact of Mrs. Gray having suddenly become Lady Hastings in no wise altered any of the circumstances of his former gift of the silk.

"Never mind, dear," he said kindly, bending over her; "it

doesn't matter in the least. I am sure Mrs. Gr—, Lady Hastngs, I mean, is anxious to be friends with you."

"Friends!" screamed his wife tearfully, starting up and dashing the handkerchief from her eyes. "I will never be friends with that woman, though she be Lady Hastings a thousand times over. Friends with a woman who gets her clothes from a pawnbroker!"

"From a *what?*" cried Colonel Hunter, wondering if the events of the evening had not proved too much for his wife's brain.

"Yes," reiterated Mrs. Hunter; "gets her clothes from a pawnbroker! Since you will have it so, I must tell you all, I suppose. I know for a certain fact that that is what your fine Lady Hastings does. Yes, and you shall hear my proof, whatever it may cost me!"

"Well?" cried he, gazing at her.

"Do you remember a roll of peculiar patterned Eastern silk that you gave me some time ago? I was very hard up, and had no use for it—and—and—Frilling sold it for me to Jacobs, the pawnbroker. I dare say it was very wrong—but I had to pay a bill, and didn't know where on earth to turn for the money. I didn't like to come to you, Lionel; I was afraid you would think me so dreadfully extravagant. Well, Mrs. Gray—or Lady Hastings as she now calls herself—had had the face to appear in a dress made of the very silk. It was impossible to mistake it. I recognised it in a moment; there never was another pattern like it. Nevertheless, for I could scarcely believe a woman professing to be a lady would do such a thing, I asked Mrs. Gray herself where she got the silk. And she would give me no answer. She said there was a mystery connected with the dress (I knew that already), and she could not say where it came from. What do you think now?"

"My dear Harriet," he said at last, "I must say you have acted very foolishly and very wrongly throughout. Leaving alone the question of the use you made of that beautiful silk, my present, I cannot but think that a lady who *pawns* things has no business to find fault with another because she *buys* them. However, as it so happens, Lady Hastings did not procure her dress from the pawnbroker. In the old days, I myself gave Mrs. Miles the silk which you have seen Lady Hastings wearing, and her aunt gave it to her in her trousseau; the other half of the silk I gave to you. Now, my dear, you may think what you like of my part in this transaction, so long as you leave me at liberty to think what I like of yours."

Neither Colonel nor Mrs. Hunter ever again referred to the incident of the pawned gown. After her dinner-party Mrs. Hunter was extremely unwell, and she and her husband went for a short tour on the Continent. When they returned to Swire Old House, Sir James and Lady Hastings had moved into the Manor, and the two families are now on the friendliest terms possible.

THEIR GOLDEN WEDDING.

With heart to bear and brain to win,
What matter fortune tarried?
Faith, hope, and love are strong in youth—
And so they married.

Nor did they once regret the step,
Despite of cares and troubles;
And that ere long youth's gilded hopes
Proved rainbow bubbles.

For still they loved, and love has faith
To pilot roughest weather;
And so they braved the sea of life—
And rowed together.

And by-and-by the sun broke forth,
Showing them peaceful haven,
In which to rest and seek the joys
They long had craven.

And so, although a chequered Spring,
Summer gave goodly measure,
While Autumn falling did but bring
Still richer treasure.

And when the frosts of Winter came,
Their locks with silver threading,
They called their dear ones round to keep
Their golden wedding.

But on the morning of that day
When grandchildren came peeping
To bid them hasten to the feast—
Lo! both were sleeping.

God loved and pitied them, and so
Their wave-worn bark He tided:
That they in death, as they in life,
Were not divided.

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The Argosy

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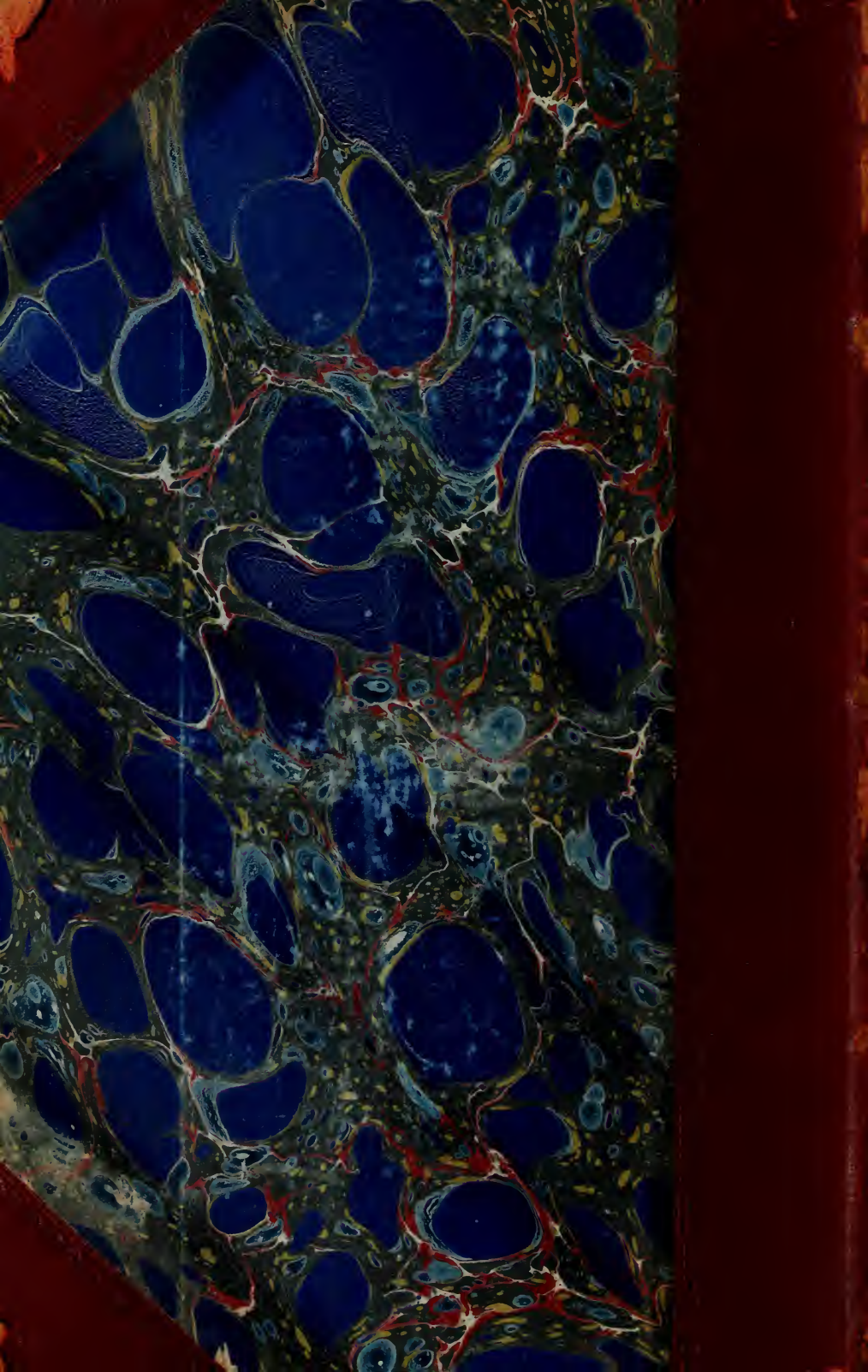
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